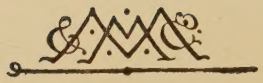
# AN INTRODUCTION TO EARLY CHURCH HISTORY



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# AN INTRODUCTION TO EARLY CHURCH HISTORY

BEING A SURVEY OF THE RELATIONS OF CHRISTIANITY AND PAGANISM IN THE EARLY ROMAN EMPIRE

BY

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οὐκ ἀμάρτυρον αὑτὸν ἀφῆκεν

ACTS xiv. 17

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED

ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON

1918

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# PREFACE

THE following sketch is intended as an introduction to the study of Christianity in its earlier stages of progress up to the accession of Constantine. It makes no pretension to survey *in detail* either the history of the Empire or the history of the Church within that period, but rather endeavours by means of a series of impressions to meet the needs of students and others who desire to possess a compact statement of the main features of a development which culminated in the acceptance of Christianity as an imperial religion and, incidentally, transformed its primitive organisation into the ordered and stable system of Catholicism. The writer hopes that such an outline will elucidate the chief factors of a fascinating historical process, suggesting lines upon which a fuller and closer study may proceed, and indicating the authorities, patristic and otherwise, for a wider enquiry. It is obvious that some important features can only be incidentally mentioned, as, for example, the tendencies of Christian thought and the growth of dogma with details of heresy and ecclesiastical controversy. Attention has rather been concentrated on what perhaps is more generally desired, a survey of the movement in its contact with the empire, its influence, its self-defence and the public verdict.

It may be added that a handbook has sometimes to express in a sentence an opinion which a monograph

alone can justify, and to sum up a whole epoch by a stroke of the pen. Our knowledge of the period is steadily advancing, although for the second century our information is notoriously scanty. The most useful works of reference accessible to English readers together with the original authorities are indicated in the conspectus (Appendix I.). A complete bibliography would require a volume to itself. No one can work in this field of history without being conscious of immense indebtedness to the distinguished historians and scholars who have done so much to enrich our knowledge of the early empire. While not unmindful of my incalculable obligation to them, I have endeavoured to exercise some independence of judgment by using, as far as possible, the original sources upon which all have depended.

In the quotations from the Fathers and other authorities, except where otherwise stated, I have followed the renderings of the *Ante-Nicene Christian Library* or Gwatkin's invaluable *Selections from Early Christian Writers*: occasionally I have ventured on a translation of my own.

I gratefully acknowledge the kindness of my friend and former collaborator, Dr. H. B. Workman, who has read the manuscript and made some helpful criticisms and suggestions.

KESWICK, 14 *November*, 1917.

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# RISE OF THE NEW FAITH AND ITS EARLIEST CONFLICT

All the stains of ill
That shame us yet shall melt and break
The long, long night of universal dread.

VIRGIL (Conway's trans.).

No circumstance in the history of religion is more noteworthy than the new idea that arose with Christianity . . . of a universal religion. With this idea proselytism arose. Extremely remarkable is also the dispersion of the Oriental Jews in the West and the diffusion of the new religion among the people who were the civilised conquerors of the world and who communicated it to the conquered and uncivilised nations.

NOVALIS

# CHAPTER I

## RISE OF THE NEW FAITH AND ITS EARLIEST CONFLICT

**The vision of Virgil.**

In a memorable poem written about 40 B.C. the Roman poet Virgil heralded the advent of a child whose birth was to inaugurate a new order for humankind. Christian tradition, represented by outstanding writers such as Augustine and Dante, has for ages regarded this poem as a genuine prophecy of the coming Messiah inspired possibly by the Jewish scriptures, the Sibylline books and the Messianic expectation which, breaking the bounds of Israel, floated over the gentile world at the end of the pre-Christian era. There is hardly any doubt that Virgil, true to the practical bent of the Roman mind, had in view the hourly-expected birth of a child to Octavian and Scribonia: but as it happened, it was not a son, but a daughter (the afterwards notorious Julia) that was born. Now, though the immediate reference of this glowing poem (*Eclogue* iv., known as the 'Pollio,' being dedicated to the consul of the year who bore that name[1]) is undoubted and though the hope which inspired it was doomed to disappointment, it was not less a Messianic psalm, because the writer did not

[1] To English readers the poem is familiar in Pope's imitation known as *The Messiah*. See for a critical study *Virgil's Messianic Eclogue*, by Mayor, Fowler and Conway. Cf. Rendel Harris' art. 'Sibylline Oracles,' Hastings' *DB*, vol. v.

live to see the real fulfilment of his vision. We may well believe that Virgil, perhaps the greatest, certainly the most tender of Roman poets, with the soul of a seer ever yearning for the 'further shore,' owed some portion of his inspiration to the same divine Reason (or Logos) which informed the spirit of an Isaiah and the mind of a Plato. He lived in a transition age. Behind him was a century of gloom and confusion. The Roman republic had broken up under the strain of a succession of civil wars: distinguished men like the Gracchi, Caesar and Cicero had been murdered: wholesale massacres were followed by a wholesale proscription, as in the Terror of the French Revolution: the provinces were oppressed by extortionate governors: the economic fabric of Italy was disintegrated: and men still shuddered to think of the hideous penalty inflicted on six thousand prisoners —the remnant of the revolting army of Spartacus and his gladiators—who were hung on crosses the whole length of the *via Appia*. The civilised world seemed to be on the brink of an irretrievable chaos—a colossal and disastrous upheaval. 'Not a god gave a thought to mortal affairs,' said the poet Lucan, a convinced republican, looking back on a Rome that had passed beyond the control of the higher powers.

**The birth of Christ.**

But the end was not yet. With the victory (B.C. 31) of Octavian over his rival Antony at Actium, a dawn of hope began to shine on the empire of the Caesars. The clash of arms was silent: and Octavian, henceforth to be known as Augustus, was hailed not without reason as the harbinger of a new era of prosperity and peace. Contenting himself with the titles of *Imperator* and

*Princeps* and carefully avoiding the hated name of *Rex*, he skilfully steered his way through the prejudices of army, senate and people, and by a wise moderation and self-restraint securely established himself in a sovereignty which amid many vicissitudes was to last for five centuries. But while Augustus by his position in history has not a few claims to the interest of posterity, he is chiefly to be remembered by the unique event which all the ages regard as the real fulfilment of ancient prophecy, Sibylline oracles and poetic visions. In the last decade of Augustus' reign (modern chronology now fixes the date as B.C. 4[1]) Jesus Christ was born in the obscure province of Judaea: and thus 'when the fullness of the time came,' a world-faith arose, as a world-empire had reached its zenith of power. The historic synchronism is for ever significant.

**The empire and its administration.**

The domination of Rome covered, as St. Luke reminds us, 'the whole habitable world.' It was at once the opportunity and the auxiliary of the new religion. Stretching from the city of Carlisle to the city of Circesium on the Euphrates, the empire at this time included within its boundaries all Europe (with the exception of the unexplored and unknown lands of Scandinavia and modern Russia north of the Black Sea), the great basin of the Mediterranean with the northern coast of Africa

[1] See art. Dates, Hastings' *DAC*, with references: and cf. Hastings' *ERE*, artt. 'Calendar (Christian),' p. 91, §14 and 'Chronology,' p. 611. On the other hand an earlier date, namely B.C. 6, is supported by C. H. Turner in Hastings' *DB* art. 'Chronology' and by Ramsay *Was Christ born at Bethlehem?* p. 215 ff. Cf. the same author's art. 'Numbers, Hours and Years' in Hastings' *DB*, vol. v. For abbreviations of titles of books, see Conspectus, App. i.

and the country of Egypt, and all Asia from the Aegean Sea to Mesopotamia. This vast territory was controlled by a system of administration which in some respects has never been equalled. Perhaps the British government of India is as close an analogy to the Roman method as modern history can supply. The conquered races were safeguarded from revolt: internecine quarrels ceased: native princes were left in virtual charge of their own people: the general features of each nationality were preserved, and upon the whole imperium lay the authority of Rome—Rome firm but not intolerant,[1] true to her ideal of imposing the arts of peace, sparing the subject peoples and reducing to impotence the proud. At this time, as all readers of Milton's *Ode on the Nativity* will remember, the Roman peace was undisturbed: there was, at least, no outstanding conflict.

> No war or battle's sound
> Was heard the world around
> . . . . . .
> And kings sate still with awful eye,
> As if they surely knew their sovran Lord was by.

The provinces were on the whole wisely administered by proconsul or legatus,[2] as the case might be, and so long as the central power of Rome, the senate, was unimpaired the system worked well. It broke up only when the heart of the empire became degenerate and was no longer equal to functions which controlled and maintained a body so vast and unwieldy.

[1] See Virgil, *Aeneid*, vi. 852-3.

[2] The former, appointed by the Senate, held rule over the senatorial provinces: the latter over the imperial provinces, which required a military force and a military officer subordinate to the emperor.

**'Salvation is of the Jews.'**

The earliest ministry of the Founder of Christianity was exercised in the cosmopolitan atmosphere of Galilee —'Galilee of the Gentiles'—and the climax of His work was reached when the hostility of the orthodox Jews brought Him to judgment before the representative of the empire in the person of Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judaea. It was to this event that Tacitus (*Ann.* xv. 44) referred when he made the famous comment on the Neronian persecution of the Christians that 'Christus who gave them their name had been first put to death in the reign of Tiberius by the procurator Pontius Pilate.' Tacitus wrote nearly eighty years after the date of the crucifixion, and it may appear to be a surprisingly inadequate allusion for a Roman historian to offer in regard to so momentous an event. Yet it is to be remembered that though Christ in His brief life was never out of touch with Roman law, Roman institutions and Roman civilisation,[1] and though He was well known in the trading cities of Galilee and the coasts of Tyre and Sidon which were the haunts of gentile peoples, it was among the Jews that His chief work was done. Of Jewish ancestry He drew His inspiration from the scriptures of Israel. He disputed with the doctors and leaders of the ancient faith, and it was through the hostility of the orthodox heads of the Jewish religion that He was finally condemned to death by crucifixion—Rome's method of punishing slaves and hardened criminals. Salvation came to the world through the Jews, and this remarkable people were destined to be the chief intermediaries between the gospel and the empire, and eventually the rivals and opponents of the apostles.

[1] The census registration in Luke $2^{1}$ and the question of the tribute to Caesar, Mt. $22^{25}$, Mk. $12^{17}$, Lk. $20^{25}$, are typical events.

**The break with Judaism.**

We can only briefly summarise the chief features of the subtle, complicated and far-reaching relationship between Judaism and Christianity. After the death of Jesus two factors combined to save Christianity from being absorbed into Judaism. One was the extraordinary spiritual revival associated with the day of Pentecost: the other was the personality of the apostle Paul. The event of Pentecost awakened the slumbering hostility of the Jewish authorities against the Christian Church at Jerusalem. The martyrdom of Stephen followed as the firstfruits of the new Christian self-consciousness: and as the result of a fiercer persecution the Christian Jews were scattered far afield into northern Syria and Asia Minor. A remnant, however, remained in Jerusalem, but fled to Pella on the destruction of the city by Titus in the year 70. Finally, the Christian Jews of Palestine dwindled into the sect known as Ebionites and disappeared altogether in the fourth century. Meanwhile the Christian leaven began to permeate the Judaism of the Graeco-Roman world. Jews, since the days of the Captivity, had formed a 'dispersion' or population scattered over the empire.[1] The conquests of Alexander had further developed the process of extension, with the result that the Jewish mind had became familiar with Greek literature and philosophy, as the knowledge of the Greek language had spread into the ranks of the nation. The translation of the Hebrew scriptures into Greek, known as the Septuagint, which had been completed about the middle of the second century B.C. under the beneficent influence of Ptolemy Philadelphus at Alexandria, more than any single event tended to break down the isolation

[1] See Schürer's art. 'Diaspora' in Hastings' *DB*, vol. v.

of Israel from the gentile world. There were at least a million Jews in Egypt: more in Syria, and perhaps five millions altogether in the empire. Now, of the Jews there were two leading divisions: first, there was the old orthodox order like the Pharisees, upholders of the ancient tradition, representatives of the earlier piety, uncompromisingly loyal to the historic law and ritual system of their faith. But over against these were the devout people (or 'God-fearers'), proselytes from paganism, often exempted from circumcision on their adhesion to the Jewish faith, but professing monotheism and the moral code of Israel.[1] These facts will enable us to realise the importance of the second factor already specified which explains the non-absorption of Christianity into Judaism.

**The life-work of St. Paul.**

St. Paul, a member of the Pharisaic order, yet deeply influenced by the wider outlook received in the Hellenic university at Tarsus, became a convert to Christianity. Bred into a loyal acceptance of the dogmas of his race, he was destined never wholly to emancipate himself from the influences of his early faith: indeed, his Pharisaic training has imparted to Christian theology some distinctively Jewish conceptions which it has never lost. But on the intellectual side of his nature he was singularly sensitive to the ideas current in the wider world of Hellenism and in particular to the Greek conception of freedom alike in its civic and philosophic aspects. It is, indeed, possible that he was a liberal at heart, and by no means in complete sympathy with the rôle of persecutor of the

[1] Perhaps a better division would be (1) Palestinian Jews; (2) 'The Dispersion' (or *diaspora*), including the 'God-fearers.'

Christians into which the force of circumstances had thrust him. Further, he may have been in Jerusalem during the crucifixion and actually witnessed, as some believe, that unforgettable event. With his conversion the reaction from the narrow régime of Judaism was complete. A new and powerful personality—'intellectual,' mystic, saint, leader of men, missionary, to mention at random a few of his outstanding capacities—he brought into the Christian community an incalculable force born of his own zeal, enlightenment and courage—a force which made for life and expansion on lines hitherto unattempted. In a word he became the preacher of a universal faith. The rivalry between Jewish and Christian missionaries no doubt was a constant hindrance to the progress of the gospel: but in the second century the spirit of propagandism among the Jewish teachers died down and the Christian teachers were left masters of the field. The rivalry had been accentuated by the fact that the 'God-fearers' or 'half-Jews'[1] had from the first been the fruitful ground of activity for St. Paul and his fellow-workers. St. Paul was not an iconoclast: his aim was not the wholesale abrogation of the Jewish law: on the contrary, he regarded it as a schoolmaster that led men to Christ: like his Master, he came not to destroy but to fulfil. Nor must it be forgotten that the Jews between the exile and the advent had developed into an influential and respected nation, recognised as a living force in the empire by virtue of their religious unity, the fixity of their traditions and the purity of their domestic and social life. No doubt their peculiarities rendered them liable to the raillery of a Roman satirist like Juvenal,

[1] The term 'half-Jews' has also been applied to Christian Jews of the James type. See Workman, *Persecution in the Early Church*, p. 121.

and by some Roman officials they were but reluctantly tolerated: but their influence was remarkable, and the evangelism of St. Paul had the effect of arousing their spiritual activity just as it stirred into being the spiritual forces which were to disintegrate the religions of the empire. But the missionary zeal of the Jews soon languished and the vogue and attractiveness of their pure monotheism steadily declined. Israel had rendered a mighty service to mankind: but it was now to yield to a higher and nobler faith which was its truest fulfilment. For Christianity under St. Paul became not merely an imperial faith: in Christ 'there cannot be,' said the Apostle giving his final verdict to the world, 'Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman: but Christ is all and in all' (Col. $3^{11}$): it was in essence a world-religion, and the failure of Judaism only emphasised that fact.

**Christianity's debt to the Jews.**

Even so brief a summary as the above will enable us to account for the impression current in the early empire that Christianity was a sect of the Jews. The first preachers of Christ used the Jewish synagogues and secured the majority of their converts from the Jews, while at the same time they appealed to the pagan world. Moreover, the Old Testament was at first the only sacred book available for the early preachers, theologians and defenders of the faith. Apostle, prophet and teacher alike drew upon a written record which explained how the new order was the climax of a long spiritual process carried on in the history of the chosen people. The old faith and the new for a time lived side by side. Christianity absorbed certain elements of the Judaic religion which

were destined to be permanent, such as the truth of the divine unity and the conceptions of sin, of law and of duty. Judaism had succeeded in making converts in all ranks of society: but it had no urgent and compelling evangel for the mass of mankind. Christianity was henceforth to take its place as a missionary religion, and yet it is for ever significant as Harnack has said,[1] that 'the religion of Jesus has never been able to root itself in Jewish or even upon Semitic soil.'

[1] Cf. Harnack, *Mission and Expansion of Christianity*, i. 64.

# THE FIRST CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES: CENTRES, ORGANISATION AND INTERCOMMUNICATION

Aquinas out of Austin hath well observed another difference between the Law and the Gospel: brevis differentia inter legem et evangelium est timor et amor. We appeal to the third and fourth chapters of the Epistle to the Galatians, where we have the Jewish Church, a type of the true Evangelical Church, brought in as a child in its minority in servitude, under tutors and governors, shut up under the Law till the time of that emphatical revelation of the great mystery of God should come, till the day should break and all the shadows of night fly away.

JOHN SMITH, the Cambridge Platonist.

Any one who, with the map of the Roman Empire before him merely hears the names of St. Paul's stopping places will be bound to wonder at the world-wide extent of his sphere of work: Tarsus, Jerusalem, Damascus, Antioch, Cyprus, Iconium, Galatia, Phrygia, Ephesus, Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth, Illyricum, Rome—perhaps also Crete and Spain—the sower who ploughed the furrows and scattered the seed over this wide area deserves to have it said of him that his field was the world. The cosmopolitan cities were his special spheres of work. Paul, the city resident, evangelised in the cities; churches dedicated to St. Paul should, therefore, be built not 'before the walls,' but in the forum, where in an ancient city stood the temple of Hermes, the god whom the people of Lystra took St. Paul to be.

DEISSMANN.

## CHAPTER II

### THE FIRST CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES: CENTRES, ORGANISATION AND INTERCOMMUNICATION

**Our first church history and other N.T. evidence.**

The crowning virtue of the Acts of the Apostles—our chief authority for the founding of Christianity in the empire—lies in the fact that it presents us with an authentic and connected historical record of the missionary activity of St. Paul and his colleagues: and if it is a calamity that the story abruptly closes with the apostle's imprisonment in Rome, it is a matter for gratitude that we know so much about the stages of his progress in his endeavour to reach the capital of the empire. We are apt to suppose that the close of the Acts is the latest trustworthy evidence available within the New Testament for information regarding the Christian propaganda in its earlier movements. Modern criticism, however, has made it clear that we may look for authentic and accurate history in other books, *e.g.* in the Apocalypse, with its undoubted application to the Neronian persecution; in the Epistle of St. James, written probably before the end of the first century by one to whom St. Paul was less an authoritative teacher than a travelling evangelist; in the First Epistle of St. Peter, which deals with a persecution later than that of Nero; and in the Second Epistle of St. Peter (so-called), probably composed in the second

century by a different writer with a less cultured mind: while the Epistles of St. Paul to the Philippians, the Colossians and the Ephesians (the latter a circular letter for the Churches of Asia); the Pastoral Epistles, which contain much genuine Pauline matter even if they be supposed to have been edited by a Pauline co-worker or even a later redactor; the Epistle to the Hebrews, which, written as it was after the fall of Jerusalem, prepared the Christian Jews for the triumph of the new covenant and the final supersession of the old; and the great Johannine writings (the Fourth Gospel and the Three Epistles)—all these afford evidence of Christian life subsequent to the date of St. Paul's first imprisonment in 63 A.D. It is probable that in 64 St. Paul was released from prison just before the great fire of Rome and the Neronian persecution of the Christians. His work had suffered a five years' interruption by continuous imprisonment at Jerusalem, Caesarea and Rome. He was, however, now able to visit Corinth, Ephesus and Miletus, and to found a church in Crete: he may even have reached Spain.[1] According to tradition he was again made prisoner of the empire and was put to death along with St. Peter about the year 67.[2]

[1] *I.e.* if this interpretation of the words of Clement of Rome (*First epistle to the Corinthians*, 5) 'the farthest bounds of the west' is correct.

[2] But see Workman, *PEC* (Appendix C), for considerations in favour of an earlier date. Ramsay (*Church in the Roman Empire*, pp. 279-95) argues in favour of B.C. 80 as the date of St. Peter's death and is followed by Swete and Gwatkin: but see Workman *loc. cit.* for the authorities in support of the traditional view that both Apostles died in the Neronian persecution. There is no persecution in B.C. 80, into which St. Peter's martyrdom can be fitted, and Ramsay's theory leaves a long period of the Apostle's life unexplained.

**Strategic centres of early Christianity.**

The victory of Christianity over Judaism which resulted in the absorption of thousands of Jews into the Christian society was won by the genius and spiritual insight of St. Paul, while three years after his death the fall of Jerusalem would afford a confirmation of his views and would further quicken the Jewish movement to the Christian fold. Yet he was pursued in all his communities by the hostility of the extreme orthodox party—the Judaizers who opposed his teaching: nor were the Christian leaders to be exempt from these attacks until the second century, when the Judaizing movement disappeared before the advance of Christianity. We know from the Acts of the Apostles the strategic points of the empire where Christianity established itself for its great advances. In Asia there were Galilee and Jerusalem: Antioch on the Orontes in Syria, the third city in the world, nobly built and famous for its lovely garden suburb (Daphne), the meeting-place of East and West, where the scornful title of 'Christians' was first applied as a nickname to a sect which included both Jews and Gentiles: and on the Aegean seaboard the city of Ephesus, which, in the early days of Christianity, was a more important centre than Rome and ranked in the apostolic age in importance with Antioch and Jerusalem. In Europe there were the cities of Thessalonica (the modern Salonika) and Philippi, both in the province of Macedonia: Athens and Corinth, the chief cities of the province of Achaia, and Rome the metropolis not only of Italy but of the world. In Alexandria, the second city of the world, the capital of Egypt, a great university city and the greatest port of the Mediterranean, two-fifths of the population were Jews: but there is no mention in the New Testament of

any Christian church there: only of the conversion of the Alexandrian Jew, Apollos (Acts $17^{24}$), at Ephesus. Yet Christianity spread rapidly in the city, and in the middle of the second century the Christian community of Alexandria was one of the most important in the world.

**Greek the popular language.**

Undoubtedly St. Paul's influence in the empire owed not a little to the fact that he possessed the rights of Roman citizenship (*civitas*)—a privilege which had been extended during the previous century to the better-class Jews of the empire and is in itself a testimony to the general respect in which the Jewish race was held by official Rome. As a Jew, as a member of the Greek university of Tarsus, and as a Roman citizen, St. Paul represented in his own wonderful personality the elements of civilisation which were to be fused into the comprehensive appeal of the new faith to mankind. The language in which he spoke and wrote was the 'common' or popular Greek of the Mediterranean lands and of the East generally. This kind of Greek (known as 'Hellenistic' in contrast with the purer classical Greek of the ancient poets, historians and philosophers of Greece) was the usual medium of communication outside of Italy, but even in Italy itself it was freely used.[1] Latin, of course, maintained itself as the spoken and literary tongue of Rome, Italy and its families in the various outposts of the empire. The fact that all the New Testament books were written in Greek—possibly only the first gospel

[1] Juvenal, *Sat.* vi. 187 f., inveighs against the tiresome habit of Roman women in talking Greek on all occasions: and in *Sat.* iii. 61 he speaks of Rome as *Graeca urbs* (a Greek Rome) because of the crowds of Greeks there: see also p. 90.

owed anything to a source other than Greek—and that the Old Testament scriptures had become known only through a Greek translation (the Septuagint, cf. p. 8) is proof sufficient that no new faith or form of thought could win the notice of the empire except in that tongue. The vast accumulation of papyri found in the rubbish heaps of Egypt, and still in process of discovery and decipherment, furnish us with new and valuable evidence of the fact that the Greek of the early Christian writers is not a sacred and unique tongue but the popular Greek of the empire, which, even with such literary embellishment as a university-trained mind like St. Paul's could add, was easily 'understanded of the people.' It was the *lingua franca* of the great gentile world—though, of course, spoken also by the Jews [1] of the Dispersion. All the other tongues into which the New Testament was translated—Syriac, Armenian, Coptic and even Latin (in the old pre-Jerome Latin version—the *vetus Itala*)—appealed to a limited area of the world's population as compared with the widely-diffused Greek.

**Social divisions and types.**

Taking then Rome, Alexandria and Antioch as the three great centres of the civilised world at the beginning of the Christian era, and as therefore including on a grand scale the types of humanity to which Christianity was to make its appeal, we distinguish the native Roman or Italians who were naturally less numerous in the two Eastern cities and the Greek-speaking members of the subject races which included the Jews. The countries of

[1] We have to distinguish between the Aramaic-speaking Jews of Palestine and the Jews who were Jews by birth and religion but not by country and language : the language of the latter was Greek.

the west, Spain and Gaul, were Latin in outlook, Asia Minor and Greece were Hellenistic—an epithet which conveniently sums up the wide influence of the Greek language and thought and characterises the Greek-speaking and Greek-thinking elements of the empire. Alexandria, from its earliest foundation a Greek city, was a centre of Hellenistic life and letters—perhaps also 'the most representative type of what may be called Hellenistic Christianity': but west of Alexandria African Christianity was of the Latin type: and North Africa, with the notable city of Carthage as centre, was to give to the Christian Church three great Latin fathers, Tertullian, Cyprian and Augustine. In general there were two main divisions of society—an upper and a lower. The upper (*honestiores*) were free-born citizens of the higher and higher-middle classes; the lower (*tenuiores*) were free men engaged in the smaller trades and freedmen—who doubtless constituted the majority of this class—that is, slaves who had been emancipated. This was the division that began to be recognised about the time of Marcus Aurelius: but in the early days of Christianity and in the Rome of St. Paul a greater distinction was made between the citizen who had the franchise and the non-citizen, the citizen class including the nobles and the 'knights' (*equites*), the rich middle-class capitalists, bankers and merchants; the non-citizen being composed of the multitude or 'rabble' without regular occupation and loafers, 'lewd fellows of the baser sort.'[1] Below these two classes, and separated by a chasm that was to endure for centuries, were the slaves absolutely without

[1] Cf. Tucker, *Life in the Roman World of Nero*, p. 241, who remarks that while Rome contained the largest proportion of this class, it would be represented in every considerable city round the Mediterranean.

rights—mere chattels of their owners, who down to the age of Hadrian had the right of putting them to death. At the same time emancipation was common: slaves were permitted without hindrance to enjoy their own religion, and there was no interference with their education. A slave might even be highly educated and become the friend and confidant of his master: he might also rise to the position of emperor as did Pertinax and Diocletian, who were both of servile descent.[1] We have to imagine that in the cities and towns of the empire that these well-marked divisions of the social order were reproduced.

**Organisation of the Christian community.**

In attempting to understand the influences which fixed the forms of government in a given Christian community, we have always to remember that there was a strong Jewish element in most places, even where the Gentile-Christian propaganda was active. The synagogue, with its recognised officials, undoubtedly affected the organisation of the churches and continued to exercise an influence in this way, until the increasing number of Jewish proselytes and purely gentile converts brought into play other ideals. It is easy to see, for example, that the primitive community at Jerusalem of which James was the head, was rigidly Jewish in form and organisation. Stephen's extreme views represented a reaction from the restricted and local form of organisation which he regarded as too parochial in relation to spiritual needs of the gentile world. Undoubtedly the influence of the synagogue tended to disappear in the larger atmosphere of the rapidly increasing Christian community reinforced by types of

[1] For the relationship of Christianity to slavery see below, p. 122.

emotion, religious instinct and tradition quite alien to Judaism and familiar with gentile forms of association and worship. Without anticipating what is to be said later regarding the religions of the empire, it is sufficient to point out the fact that the Christian community was influenced outwardly and inwardly by the various political, religious and social organisations of the empire, such as guilds and clubs, in the interest of a special trade, but more especially societies for celebrating mysteries and religious rites of various cults. When we pass from the church of Jerusalem to that at Corinth, we are at once made aware of the richness, variety and exuberance of religious thought and ideal which were possible in a community drawn from a pagan environment. The picture, at the same time, reveals some disquieting features. What Harnack calls 'the tension between spirit and office,' between a spiritual gift (or *charisma*) and the regulated authority which makes for order and self-control, becomes evident as we read St. Paul's letter. It was to continue throughout the history of the church: on the one hand, the officialism of pope, bishop, presbyter: on the other, the spontaneous spiritual zeal of ascetic, monk, saint and layman.

**The threefold order.**

The founder of a Christian church was an apostle, who received his mandate from Christ. He was an itinerant 'missionary': for by that term the word 'apostle' may fitly be rendered when we also emphasise the source of his authority. With him lay the appointment of the presbyters or the local officials who acted in his name. In addition there were workers in the church known as 'prophets' (who were usually non-resident,

in any case not necessarily resident in one place) and 'teachers': their special gifts gave them a superior position in relation to other forms of service, such as 'evangelists' and 'pastors.' Roughly speaking, we can distinguish in the early Christian communities a threefold order: (1) inspirational—including apostles, prophets and teachers, who were expositors of the Word of God and owed their authority as inspired instructors to their spiritual 'gift' or charism; (2) administrative-presbyters or elders (also called *episcopi*), whose functions of discipline were assigned to them by virtue of their age and experience; and (3) officials, such as deacons and deaconesses, who were elected for service and oversight in the interest of poorer members and others. All these offices, with the exception of the apostolate and presbyterate, were open to both sexes.

**The names of the community.**

The Christian community was known as the 'brotherhood' (1 Pe. $2^{17}$) and as 'the church' or *ecclesia*—a term originally used of the body of free citizens in a Greek city or *polis*—while also recognised as a part of a larger whole known as 'the church of God.' The church of God was regarded in the earliest times as a local sojourner,[1] or *paroecus* (whence the name 'parish'), a term which suggests transiency and may be due to the expectation of the Parousia or Coming of the Lord, which was current in Christian circles from 35 to 150 A.D.: for everything within that period was moving on to that divine event; at least such was the belief of the average Christian, who therefore felt no temptation to retire

[1] Cf. 1 Pe. $1^{1}$, $1^{17}$, $2^{11}$, Heb. $11^{13}$, 1 Clem. i. 1, and references in Harnack, *MEC*, i. 407.

into monastic seclusion, but was prepared to tarry till his Lord came. With the passing of the apostles or apostolic men, the administrative headship of the church tended to become vested in a leading presbyter, to whom the title 'bishop' (*episcopus*) was given, though originally this term had been used interchangeably with presbyter. Nowhere in the New Testament do we find anything corresponding with this type of monarchical bishop. The evidence for the development is afforded by the writings of Ignatius, and in the age of the Antonines the supremacy of the bishop is everywhere to be found: while certain functions originally performed by bishops or presbyters were now formally assigned to deacons.

**The first missionary movement.**

Postponing a discussion of the significance of this development until we deal directly with the inner life of the community, we may note once more that the word 'apostle' is the Greek for 'missionary,' and Christianity in its earlier advances was essentially a missionary or pioneer movement. St. Paul and his colleagues, Barnabas, Silas, Timothy and others were 'prophets' as well as missionaries, that is, inspired preachers and expositors of the Word, who were moved by the Holy Ghost out of the depth of a new-found experience and by His inward illumination to proclaim 'truth' as they found it 'in Jesus' (Eph. $4^{21}$). Men, who were not 'apostles' in the original signification of the term as ordained of Christ Jesus, exercised, as we know from the *Didachê* and other sources, these functions of inspired testifying and also moved about from place to place. Prof. Ramsay[1] has thrown a flood of light upon the

[1] See Appendix i. for literature.

evidence afforded by the New Testament of the conditions, social and geographical, and the many-coloured interest of this untiring propaganda. The Acts of the Apostles is a fragment of real history and, with its thrilling pictures of actual episodes and adventures, has a dramatic interest without parallel in ancient literature. Take, as an example, the visit of St. Paul and Barnabas to Lystra—a little town in South Galatia situated in a mountainous and secluded district. Read the simple story of the historian (Acts $14^{8}$ f.) and one can discern by a *coup d'œil* the varied features of an entrancing incident, the speech of St. Paul in the open air to a wondering crowd, the unexpected command to the lame man, a hopeless cripple, 'stand upright on thy feet,' the sudden cure, the excited cry of the multitude who lapsed into their own local dialect as they proclaimed 'The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men,' their identification of the apostle with Hermes, the inventor of speech, and of Barnabas—the most imposing figure—with Zeus, the procession of the priests of Zeus with garlands and sacrificial oxen, the people's transference of their worship to the human deities who had visited them (just as in the famous legend of their land Zeus and Hermes had once visited the humble cottage of Philemon and Baucis), the repudiation of their homage by St. Paul, and his tactful appeal to the living God of history and nature who had left the witness of His being in human hearts. From such a scene and others as dramatic at the Areopagus of Athens, in Philippi and in Ephesus, one can gather the extraordinary interest of the crowd in the new faith and the equally extraordinary gifts of its advocates as revealed in their method of so presenting the truth as to win the conviction of their very varied audiences.

**Travelling and postal system of the empire.**

It is easy to see that the magnificent road system of the empire helped the itinerant preachers of the gospel in the same way that the post roads of England, Scotland and Wales furthered the missionary labours of John Wesley. For the first two and a half centuries of the empire the Roman peace was only broken by occasional conflicts. Travelling from Britain, Gaul and Spain to Rome was probably less dangerous and more easy than in the middle ages, even if we discount the perils endured by the hero of Reade's *Cloister and the Hearth* in his journey from Deventer to Rome as the embellishments of a romancer. 'Could not every man,' says an early historian,[1] 'go whither he would without fear? Hellenes and barbarians may wander from their own homes to arrive at their own homes: the Cilician gates, the narrow sandy roads to Egypt through Arabia present no terrors of mountain pass, torrents or savages: to be the Emperor's subject, to be a Roman is the one talisman.' As St. Paul entered Rome by the Appian Road—the oldest and most famous highway in the world—so must many a Christian missionary have trodden the *via Aurelia* which skirted the Tyrrhenian Sea to Milan and Genoa, thence to become the *via Julia Augusta* which led through Nice and Marseilles into Spain. At Milan began the Alpine roads across the Mont Genèvre, the Great St. Bernard and the Little St. Bernard, the latter leading to Vienna, to Geneva and Strassburg, while from Aosta over the Great St. Bernard the road passed along the Rhone valley

[1] Aristides of Smyrna, quoted by Friedländer, *Roman Life and Manners under the Early Empire*, i. 269 f., to whom I am also indebted for other particulars of roads and posts. Cf. Hastings' *DB* art. 'Roads and Travel (NT),' vol. v.

also to Strassburg, and finally reached Worms and Mainz, diverging on the west to Rheims. The road to Britain went by Rheims and Amiens to Boulogne, and the crossing was to Richborough (Rutupiae) in Kent. The *via Appia* led from Rome by Capua to Brundisium: the crossing was to Dyrrhachium, where the great *via Egnatia* went through Macedonia and Thrace to Constantinople. In Asia Minor it was possible to travel from Tarsus by the way of the Cilician gates—the famous gap in the Taurus mountains—through Lycaonia and Phrygia of the Galatian territory and northwards by way of the Phrygia of the province of Asia to Troas on the Aegean Sea or westwards to Ephesus. This wonderful system of intercommunication between East and West, Europe and Asia, developed as the empire developed, so that Tertullian could write of 'as many cities as there once were hovels, of swamps drained and sand made fertile.' The destruction or decay of the old Roman road is one of the outstanding blots of civilisation, due to the sway of Islam and the splitting up of Europe into individual nationalities throughout the middle ages. The state postal-system, which was perfected by Augustus, was only intended for state and public correspondence, and was carried out by military couriers. Private correspondence was arranged to be carried by means of travellers and friends,[1] to whom personal letters were entrusted for delivery at the towns or places to which they travelled: but gradually private posts came to be more systematically managed, and from the time of Hadrian onwards, by means of guilds of

[1] *E.g.* the letter to the Colossian Church, and the circular letter to the churches of Asia, known as that to the Ephesians, were sent by St. Paul from Rome by the hands of Tychichus, who also carried the letter to Philemon.

carriers and jobbers, established themselves as a popular institution.

Travellers went on foot or by mule or horse, but rarely pursued the journey alone: even the poorer were accompanied by at least one slave. Seneca [1] describes how on one occasion he took to the simple life and made a poor man's journey. He went with a friend, Caesarius Maximus, carrying all their luggage on them, requiring only one extra carriage for their few attendants, sleeping on a mattress on the bare earth and covered by a waterproof sheet and coverlet, living on dried figs and other simple food, and recording their impressions in notebooks. Seneca was a courtier and immensely rich: and though the trip only lasted for two days, he learnt of what superfluities ordinary living consisted, but could not get rid of the feeling of shame in being seen to be travelling, so to speak, third-class! Incidentally, therefore, the mode of living and travelling adopted by the early Christian apostles and prophets was a protest against the vulgar luxury of the empire, while it further explains the emphasis laid on hospitality [2] as a duty owed by fellow Christians to each other.

[1] Cf. Friedländer, *op cit.* p. 287, drawn from Seneca, *Ep.* 87.

[2] Cf. Rom. $12^{13}$.

# THE RIVAL FAITHS & PHILOSOPHIES OF THE EARLY EMPIRE

*We* distinguish between nations and peoples : *God* has but one house : it is this whole universe.

MINUCIUS FELIX.

With warrant Varius sang ' Be Caesar God ! '

. . . . . .

For look the wide world over, where ends Rome ?
To sunrise ? There's Euphrates—all between !
To sunset ? Ocean and immensity :
North,—stare till Danube stops you : South, see Nile,
The Desert and the earth-upholding Mount.

. . . . . .

Well may they cry ' No mortal, plainly God ! '

. . . . . .

Who stands secure ? Are even Gods so safe ?

. . . . . .

Was it for nothing the grey Sibyl wrote
' Caesar Augustus regnant, shall be born
In blind Judaea '—one to master him,
Him and the universe ? An old wife's tale ?

R. BROWNING.

O Zeus, where is now your resplendent lightning, where your deep-toned thunder, where the glowing, white-hot, direful bolt ? we know now 'tis all fudge and poetic moonshine—barring what value may attach to the rattle of the names. . . . Mankind pays you the natural wages of your laziness : if any one offers you a victim or a garland nowadays, it is only at Olympia as a perfunctory accompaniment of the games : he does it not because he thinks it is any good, but because he may as well keep up an old custom.

LUCIAN (Fowler's trans.).

Si le christianisme ne l'eût pas emporté, c'est le mithriacisme qui fût devenu la religion du monde.

RENAN.

## CHAPTER III

### THE RIVAL FAITHS AND PHILOSOPHIES OF THE EARLY EMPIRE

**Morals and religious susceptibility of the early empire.**

We have sketched the general features of the external organisation of the Christian society and the more obvious factors of the imperial system with which the first Christian communities would be brought into contact. But interesting though these phases of the Christian movement are, it is even more important to gather a clear impression of the complex spiritual and religious influences amidst which Christianity had now to live and to work.

It has been usual to assume that the age of the early empire was one of universal decadence in morals. Matthew Arnold's oft-quoted quatrain about the hard Roman world, with its secret loathing and sated lust, sums up the general verdict upon the times and the average opinion which is based upon the evidence of contemporary literature. No doubt the morals of a given age are reflected in the current literature, and we may infer the Restoration looseness from a study of the comic dramatists of that period without our judgment being called in question. But even then Wycherley and Aphra Behn did not appeal to everyone and Restoration society was not wholly rotten. Too much has probably been made of the references to the age to be found in Tacitus

and Suetonius, in the pages of Juvenal and in the fiction of Petronius Arbiter, the 'arbiter of elegance,' in the age of Nero. Nevertheless, even if we allow for the bias of the historian, the inveterate conservatism of the satirist and the tolerant humanity of the novelist, there is hardly any doubt that the corruption of Roman society was very great. The pages of Petronius are disfigured by indecency, and to Juvenal vice is more venial than offences against good taste and convention. Juvenal uses his pen to denounce the lesser faults of humanity, hates all things foreign and all foreigners, despises philosophy and harks back to the old Roman *gravitas* or seriousness of outlook and habit. The type of mind represented by Juvenal —at once impervious to new influences and regarding unconventionality an offence as serious as adultery—was fairly common and characteristic of an order of mind which was rocky ground for any new faith or religion.

On the other hand, the laxity of society produced in a much larger section of the empire a moral reaction which rendered the soul susceptible to religious appeal. The idea of a wholesale and well-nigh universal atheism must be abandoned in view of the evidence which the science of religion has accumulated of the numerous cults and religions which, both before and after the commencement of the Christian era, made their appeal to the conscience of civilised humanity. Christianity appeared in a world of competitors, but probably the least important of the rival faiths, to which we now turn our attention, was the native religion of the Roman people.

**The religion of Rome.**

There never was a religion more closely allied with the state than the Roman religion: it was in fact an integral

part of the state system, sanctioned by the tradition of the past and maintained by public custom rather than established by virtue of its power over the individual conscience. Its priests and priestly bodies or colleges were merely state officials. They founded no creed, formulated no code of ethics and produced no system of theology. They merely performed certain rites and ceremonies on stated occasions prescribed by law or custom, and there the functions of the priesthood ended. They worked by the calendar (we have it in a poetic form in the *Fasti* of Ovid): but the Roman saints' days were days set apart for rites and honours to be paid to the chief deities—Janus, Jupiter, Mars, Minerva, Saturn, Juno, Ceres—and the duty of the priests headed by their chief, the Pontifex Maximus, was to see that the proper victims were sacrificed and the proper formulae pronounced. As to the gods, their name was legion. The earliest Romans, like the earliest Greeks, worshipped the powers of Nature. It was characteristic of the practical Roman genius to invest these with personality. Consequently, the more important deities were quasi-human personalities. However, this tendency to anthropomorphism did not become a fixed element in the religion of a people whose genius was less creative than pragmatic and juristic. They made deities out of the common acts or details of daily life. There were 'little folk' who watched over the insignificant things of nature like Flora, Epona or Mellona. There was a goddess of Going-out and a goddess of Coming-in, a god of silver money or bronze money, etc. Add to these the Roman tendency to deify abstract qualities like Hope, Peace, Wealth, Health and the like. It was an easy step to the deification of the 'Fortune of the city' or Rome herself. Moreover, assigned to each person or

family were secondary counterparts or genii known as Lares, the worship of ancestors being a rooted element in the personal life of the Roman citizen, not, indeed, in the sense that the Lares represented guardian-angels, but rather that they expressed the idea of the continuity or perpetuation of the family. Every household had its *lar familiaris*, who was the tutelary spirit of the family chiefly concerned with its perpetuation: on the hearth stood his altar, whereon was sculptured his image and the figures of the two *Penates*, the guardians of the storeroom. This strong sense of the spiritual presence and beneficence of his ancestors led each paterfamilias to decorate his hall with masks (*imagines*) of the departed.

**Deification of the Genius of the emperor.**

Finally, in imperial times the deification of the Genius of the reigning emperor carried to its logical issue the inveterate officialism of Roman religion, while at the same time it was the climax of a tendency borrowed from Greece, and possibly from Etruria, of regarding the great man as semi-divine. This custom established itself on the death of Julius Caesar, who, as *divus Iulius*, took his place in the Roman Pantheon—the only ancient building in Rome whose walls have been preserved—and received the honour of a temple (*aedes*) in the Forum. It was not difficult to pass from the worship of a dead Caesar to that of a living Caesar who was the embodiment of the spirit of empire in its many manifestations.

**The religious tolerance of Rome.**

Polytheism is always tolerant, and no embargo was placed on imported cults. It was only when the sanctity of the state-system or of its tutelar head, the emperor,

appeared to be menaced that the state found it necessary to interfere, not, indeed, in the interest of religion, but on behalf of its own system. A conservative like Juvenal protested that the Orontes had flowed into the Tiber: it was indeed true, and he might have added both the Indus and the Nile as tributary rivers. From the far East and from Egypt came to Rome the stream of cults and religions: but Rome, true to her policy of tolerance, left untouched the faiths of her subject peoples. She accepted them, but made it quite clear that there was to be no flouting or abandonment on the part of a Roman citizen of the state-religion. A Roman might adopt, say, the Jewish religion, but he must not ignore the immemorial observances of the state-religion and the worship of his ancestors. He might become a Christian, but neither tacitly nor publicly was he to repudiate the obligations and customs of the imperial régime. Hence, as we shall see, Christianity was tolerated until it became misunderstood as dangerous to the sanctity of the empire. As a 'superstition' it might be 'pestilent,' but it was harmless until the individual Christian began to refuse to worship the Genius of the emperor. Even so his offence was less religious than political.

**The invading cults.**

Rome, then, as the mistress of the world, drew to herself the cults of the subject races. Captured Greece in turn captured her victor not only in letters but in religion. The ideas of Greek tragedy show that the Greek was essentially an idealist, and the mysteries of Eleusis prove his interest in the ritual of purification and personal redemption. Now, this feature of the Greek intellect was destined profoundly to modify the severely practical consciousness of Rome. The native religion of Greece

had failed to produce virtue or peace of heart. Philosophy became the supreme interest among the thoughtful and educated classes. The transition to mysticism was simple, taking on the diverse forms of peaceful initiation as in the mysteries of Eleusis and of wild intoxication of the emotions as in the worship of Dionysus or of Cybele, the Magna Mater of Phrygia. What the Orient had done for Greece, it was now to do for the centre of the Roman empire. The Oriental cults supplied the almost universal craving for mysticism, soul-purification and the assurance of immortality. From Asia Minor came the worship of Cybele and Attis, from Persia that of the sun-god Mithra, from Egypt the cults of Serapis (or Osiris—another name for Serapis) and Isis, his wife and sister. Of these faiths the strongest rivals to Christianity were Isis and Mithra. Christianity itself could not escape the influence of Oriental thought and practice.[1] The atmosphere of the Graeco-Roman world was impregnated with the ideas embodied in the mysteries of these Oriental cults. Gnosticism, which in its early forms was combated by St. Paul, was an amalgam-faith or philosophy representing the syncretism or fusion of Judaist or Christian thought with the dualism of Syria and Persia.

**Isis.**

From time to time Rome worked herself into a panic over the popularity of the new cults. In the republican age an attempt was made to suppress the Egyptian cults of Isis and Serapis: and in A.D. 9 Tiberius, in a mood of furious nationalism, instituted 'the bloodiest persecution against the priests of Isis they ever suffered.' It was all in vain. Its propaganda spread over the empire, and it

[1] See below, p. 47.

was not till the close of the fourth century that the cult of Isis received its death blow at the hands of the patriarch, Theophilus of Alexandria, who, after striking with an axe the colossal statue of Serapis, consigned his temple—the Serapeum—to the flames. About the same time the vogue of Mithraism waned. What was the secret of attraction which kept these two faiths alive so long? It was not by virtue of its ethical purity or austerity that the cult of Isis secured its popularity: on the contrary, its morals were loose and its mysteries open to the worst suspicion.[1] The paradox of a cult which had no ethical basis lay in the fact that in despite of its indifference to morality it offered the initiate purification. In its earliest stages this was a purely ceremonial cleanliness—cleanliness of the body rather than of the soul. But later on (in the second century) the latter became the predominating interest. A new moral consciousness was awakened in its priesthood with the result that the sensual aspects of the religion disappeared and a mystic chastity became the object of the devotee. We speak of it as a religion, but it was too mixed up with magic, correctness of ritual and order, to be essentially religious. There was much outward devotion, scenic solemnity and a daily liturgy accompanied by the most elaborate ceremonial: but the real attraction to the multitude was the promise of immortality, connected as it was with the story[2] of Isis finding the body of her husband, Osiris, whose limbs had been scattered by Typhon—the god Set of the Egyptians, type of the powers of evil—and revivifying the fragments. The resurrection of Osiris

[1] See Cumont, *Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism* (E.T.), p. 81.

[2] This myth is told in Plutarch's *de Iside et Osiride*, a valuable authority on the cult written about the end of the first century A.D.

was in effect the symbolic rendering of the age-long desire to pierce the mystery of death. Hence the cult of Isis appeared to its thousands of worshippers in all lands as the authentic unveiler of the secret of death and the giver of immortality.

**Mithra.**

The worship of Mithra, Persian in origin, dates from a remote antiquity. It came to the Latin world at the close of the republic. Unlike the cult of Isis, it was distinguished by its passion for moral purity. Mithra was called *invictus*, because he was the unconquerable god of Light that assisted the faithful in the everlasting fight against the malignity of demons and the infernal powers of darkness. He, too, as *saecularis* (Lord of the Ages) seized the dead body after death, rescuing it from the power that had sought to enthral the individual during life, and raised it to immortal bliss if, after judgment, its merits outweighed its sins. The mysteries of Mithraism centred in a ritual of purification called the *taurobolium* with somewhat repulsive features. The blood of a slaughtered bull fell into a trench in which the initiate had been placed to receive from its sacramental stream the gifts of purity and strength. Whereupon he was said to be born again to eternity, and the effect of the baptism was supposed to last for twenty years. This cult spread all over the empire. Altars to Mithra are still extant among the Roman remains of Cumberland [1]

[1] There is a fine collection in Tullie House museum, Carlisle. It has been estimated that there are six hundred extant inscriptions set up by his worshippers. Cf. H. Stuart Jones, 'The Mysteries of Mithras,' *Quart. Review*, No. 440, Workman, *PEC*, p. 188 f., and J. Ward, *The Roman Era in Britain*, p. 110, for inscription: 'Deo soli invicto Mithrae saeculari.' See also fine plate in *Victoria County Hist. of London*, p. 132.

and other parts of Britain. The stronghold of the faith was in the army, for the average Roman legionary appear to have been curiously susceptible to the attraction of the mythical hero-god who bore the name of Invincible Saviour. At least Mithra may be said to have been the founder of a vast church militant,[1] while his cult became legalised in the empire as a *religio licita*, or authorised faith, like the worship of Cybele, with which it was associated in the imperial mind and had indeed many points of contact. At the end of the third century it made rapid strides (see p. 134).

**Gnosticism.**

Mention has already been made of Gnosticism, which offered a rival system of thought to the orthodox Christian faith parallel with Christianity itself. It was not a heretical version of Christianity, as was formerly supposed, but a medley of Oriental conceptions, due to the prevailing 'syncretism' of the age, that is, the tendency of all faiths to meet and to be merged into each other.[2] With the appearance of Christianity, Gnosticism, hitherto a vague and loosely constructed amalgam of concepts concerned chiefly with the origin of evil, and always based on the Oriental dualism of light and darkness, became crystallised into a definite, recognised system of belief which, as we have seen, St. Paul had vigorously to combat in the churches of Asia: or (to change the metaphor) it twined itself about Christianity and became a

[1] The cult spread rapidly during the second half of the third century, when persecutions had produced a reaction against Christianity, while at the same time its progress was assisted by its universal tolerance and spirit of accommodation which excluded no other faith.

[2] See *DAC* art. 'Gnosticism.'

parasitic growth, which happily did not prove fatal to the fresh and vigorous tree upon which it had fastened. Some of the earlier opponents of the faith, like Cerinthus,[1] had imbibed the chief Gnostic idea, that owing to the essential evil of all that was material there was an unbridgeable chasm between God and the universe, between spirit and matter. An imperfect world could only be the product of an imperfect being called the demiurge, a being distinct from God, and ranking as the lowest of the aeons or emanations that proceeded from the true and primal Deity. It is clear that a Gnostic Christianity meant a degraded Christ or Redeemer: hence the spiritual and intellectual passion which fired St. Paul's refutation. In fact, Gnosticism stirred Christianity to a reasoned self-consciousness. Rejecting, as it did, the Old Testament, it further quickened the development of the true *gnosis* or knowledge among the intellectual leaders of the faith, and fostered a critical spirit and a method of discrimination in reference to writings to be accepted and rejected, which resulted in the formation of the Canon of the New Testament.[2] Undoubtedly Gnosticism influenced

[1] Traditionally the enemy of St. John who, meeting him at the public baths in Ephesus, fled from him—a story of doubtful authenticity. Cerinthus had considerable influence in Galatia, and itinerated in Asia Minor, preaching a Judaeo-Gnostic philosophy.

[2] The most prominent of the Gnostic thinkers—an apostate from the orthodox faith and the church—was Marcion. R. G. Parsons (*Challenge*, No. 166, p. 143) calls him the 'most interesting and least fantastic exponent' of Gnosticism, producing 'a religious system like that of H. G. Wells in *God the Invisible King*,' while Gnosticism is practically the same as our modern 'Theosophy.' Marcion set out to found a church of his own about 144. Regarding the New Testament as vitiated by Judaistic ideas, he produced a Canon of New Testament, including a *Gospel* abridged and compiled by himself, and an *Apostolicum*, which consisted of ten Pauline epistles, also edited

Christian thought and possibly Christian ritual: on the one hand, it encouraged the mistaken attempt to uphold the Old Testament by a fanciful system of allegorising; on the other, it may have contributed to the tendency to regard the sacraments as magical rites.

**Demonology and magic.**

In addition to the cults we have briefly sketched, there came from the East a number of subsidiary beliefs which we may classify under the general terms of astrology, magic and demonology. The attempt to forecast the future, whether by horoscope [1] or magic, was based on a fatalism which regarded the processes of nature and the celestial system as constant and determined. In a world of change and catastrophe there are always people who want to secure the favour of the heavenly powers and to avert the hostility of demons or the spirits of nature by incantation and by sacrifice, by recourse to wizards who peep and mutter and other superstitious practices. Astrology is to astronomy what superstition is to religion. Undeveloped minds, curious about the secrets of the universe, indulge in crude and often childish conceptions

and redacted by his own hand, viz. Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Laodicaeans (= Ephesians), Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon. Marcion, who believed in a good God and a just but wicked God, who created the world, rejected the Old Testament, and accepted only those parts of the New Testament in which Paul, the enemy of Judaism, and his friend Luke expounded the teaching of Christ. He had a vigorous and fresh mind, and was a sufficiently influential teacher to provoke a criticism of his views from Tertullian.

[1] See *Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, part xii., ed. Grenfell and Hunt, for specimens of horoscopes, which show the hold astrology had secured in Egypt and other parts of the world in the second and third centuries: and cf. Cumont *op. cit.* pp. 162-195.

of the order of nature: yet the endless curiosity of mind and spirit, which imperfectly endeavours to rationalise both the seen and unseen worlds, is the basis of genuine science as of genuine religion. The occult sciences of the ancient world at least evoked powers of observation and research which in later ages of civilisation formulated scholastic and scientific dogmas. It is sufficient here to note that the belief in demons and spirits inhabiting the intermediate region between earth and heaven (familiar to us in the thought of the New Testament, which is coloured by Jewish and Judaizing conceptions) was widespread in the superstitious thought of the Graeco-Roman world: and, further, to remember that such ideas, even in their most fantastic forms, bear witness to the deep-seated interest of that age in unseen things and in the other world.

**Influence of the mystery-cults on Christianity.**

It has been the fashion of late years, owing to the researches of German scholars such as Reitzenstein, Dieterich and Heitmüller, and in our own country of Prof. Kirsopp Lake, to regard Christianity as itself a mystery-religion—a mystery-religion not only in the later developed forms of catholicised ritual, but from the very first, if the statements of St. Paul are properly interpreted. The *taurobolium* of Mithraism presents some obvious analogies to the Christian sacrament of baptism, but being a late development of Mithraism cannot be adduced as an argument in favour of an early mystery-form of Christianity: it is indeed more probable that here Christianity influenced the form of Mithraism than *vice versa*. But the emphasis is laid by the scholars already named on the general mysticism of St. Paul's thought combined with his specific language—his use of the terms ' mystery,'

'knowledge' (*gnosis*), 'wisdom' (*sophia*), 'mature or perfect' (*teleios*), 'spirit' (*pneuma*), 'mind' (*nous*), and 'life-principle' (*psyché*)—all of which are alleged to have analogies in Hellenistic religious usage. A careful examination [1] of St. Paul's language shows that his mysticism is of a type common to all spiritual thought, that his psychology is, if anything, more Jewish than Hellenistic in its terminology, and that his conception of an intimate union with Christ is so profoundly ethical as to stand apart from the noblest ideal of any of the mystery-faiths. But what of his language regarding baptism and the eucharist? Is Prof. Lake justified is stating that 'baptism is for St. Paul and his readers, universally and unquestionably accepted as a "'mystery,' or sacrament which works *ex opere operato*"'? [2] And is the same scholar a correct interpreter of St. Paul when he states that to the Corinthian Christians Jesus as the Redeemer-God, who had passed through death to life, 'offered participation in this new life' on condition that they shared in the mysteries of baptism and the eucharist? Undoubtedly there was a tendency in the Hellenistic world to regard the Christian sacraments as mysteries, and it is not improbable that Christian teachers in an environment peculiarly susceptible to the influences of a mystery-religion were disinclined all at once and ruthlessly to discourage in the minds of their converts the idea of a general similarity between the Christian rites and those of the mystery-cults. But we cannot believe that in the earlier years of the Christian movement a catechumen would be admitted to the rites of the Christian religion

[1] The reader is referred to the scholarly and sound study of the whole question by H. A. A. Kennedy, *St. Paul and the Mystery-religions.*

[2] Cf. Lake, *Earlier Epistles of St. Paul*, p. 385.

after having been instructed that either sacrament was a 'mystery' which ensured his salvation. As a matter of fact, St. Paul never uses the word 'mystery' to describe either baptism or the eucharist. His mysteries[1] are truths or doctrines or spiritual facts to be declared: they are not external rites.

Everything in the New Testament goes to show that the efficacy of both baptism and the eucharist sprang from an initial act of faith. Both were symbols intended only for those who repented of their sins and confessed their faith in Jesus, but symbols by means of which the believer more fully realised and experienced the grace already his through faith. There is no suggestion of a magical or semi-physical mediation of purifying grace, such as is implied in the mysteries of Eleusis, Cybele or Isis: and though we discover in the terminology of St. Paul resemblances to the language used by our available authorities in relation to the psychology and ritual of mystery-religions, underlying all his thought and its specific expression there is a lofty ethical and inward ideal, a conception of personal surrender to a historical Redeemer, the Lord who has become the Saviour-Spirit, which differentiates the whole atmosphere of Christianity from the nebulous and elusive promises of spiritual elevation held out to the initiate by the mysteries of mythical redeemer-gods.

**Stoicism.**

While through all the ranges of the society of the empire alike in Italy and the provinces religion, or at least

[1] In Phil. $4^{12}$ he speaks of his initiation (μεμύημαι), not into a mystery of purification, but into the secret of the contented mind, the offspring of the experience of Christ.

religiosity as a new factor of existence, can be traced, a select company of intellectuals in every great centre found in philosophy (St. Paul's 'wisdom') the stable consolation of life and the solution of its enigmas. Generally speaking, it was Stoicism that shaped their theory of the universe and the form in which their reflections on the problems of existence were moulded. The Stoics of the early empire, unlike the philosophers of the older Stoicism of Greece, were moralists pure and simple, and were less interested in abstract speculation than in the building up of a self-sufficing and independent character which was to find peace in harmony with the Reason of the world. What is duty and what is happiness —these were the questions to which Seneca, the minister of Nero, sought an answer. Stoicism exercised an influence by public propaganda in lecture rooms and in the open air. For example, Athenodorus, a native of Kanana near Tarsus, born about 74 B.C., gave lectures as he travelled when his student days were over, settled at Apollonia in Epirus where Augustus was his pupil, and afterwards resided in Rome where his friendship with Augustus was cemented and where he was consulted by Cicero, who was engaged on his ethical treatise *De Officiis*. Finally he returned to Tarsus, where he died in A.D. 15. We mention him because of his influence as a teacher in St. Paul's university long after his death: indeed, Ramsay [1] considers that the resemblances between the language of St. Paul and Seneca are due to the influence of their common teacher, Athenodorus.

But Stoicism not only proclaimed its tenets in public: it sought by private direction to build up the individual character and elevate its thinking. Emperors, politicians,

[1] Cf. *Cities of St. Paul*, pp. 222-3.

generals and great ladies of the imperial court or of noble houses had their philosophic director (not always, however, a Stoic) by their side in great moments of crisis or in the hour of death. The position of Lucius Annaeus Seneca, as an associate of the brutal Nero, was supremely difficult: he was a high-minded and earnest thinker, whose moral teachings have won for him a lasting repute and were so rich in spiritual intensity that they suggested to the Christian fathers the direct influence of St. Paul—an idea which was confirmed by a correspondence between the apostle and the philosopher. This, however, has proved to be fictitious, and we are thrown back on the passages in St. Paul's epistles [1] which reveal his acquaintance with Stoic teaching and the coincidences with St. Paul in Seneca's genuine writings. It is probable that Seneca's character did not wholly escape the contamination of his surroundings, but as one who 'had sounded the very depths of the moral abysses of his times,' he was clearly qualified to deal with the dark secrets of the soul. His moral earnestness for the salvation of souls is almost Christian in its intensity, and those who read his epistles and essays on ethical themes find themselves in contact with an idealist not far from the kingdom of heaven, of whom it has been well said that he is 'the earliest and most powerful apostle of a great moral revival.' For nearly twenty years, beginning with 161 A.D., a philosopher in the person of Marcus Aurelius was to sit on the imperial throne and to represent alike in his character and his writings the highest type of ethical excellence that had blossomed from the roots of the Stoic

[1] Cf. essay on 'St. Paul and Seneca' in J. B. Lightfoot's *Commentary on the Philippians*; also Dill's brilliant study in his *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius*, p. 289 f.

philosophy. He was indeed the last and perhaps the greatest saint of philosophic paganism, and it is the very irony of history that he should have persecuted the Christians for a faith of which his own *Meditations* contain many a lofty foregleam and anticipation. He will be forgiven as one who knew not what he did, by the thousands who have found in these personal outpourings the charm of a nobly-ordered and serene self-sufficingness, and who recognise that the 'city of God'[1] was dearer to him than Athens or even Rome itself.

**The preparation for the gospel.**

It is not practicable to treat in detail of the intellectuals who were the philosophic teachers and moralists of the age, nor must we dwell upon the life and work of Epictetus,[2] the contemporary of Seneca, who based on the old Cynic philosophy a noble gospel of renunciation which suggests an almost monastic and mediaeval asceticism. Suffice it to note that in the current thought of the early empire, as in its religious yearnings, there is much that prepared the way for the illuminating and transfiguring power of Christianity. On the religious side we discover in the mystery-cults the answer of paganism to the widespread yearning for reconciliation with the unseen powers, for soul-purification and for immortality: while in the ethical thought and ideals of contemporary philosophy we can trace a reaction from the prevailing laxity of the age and even a deep-seated loathing of evil in its manifold

[1] Cf. the well-known passage in Book iv.: 'All is fruit for me which thy seasons bear, O Nature! from thee, in thee and unto thee are all things. "*Dear City of Cecrops*," saith the poet; and wilt not thou say, "Dear City of God?"' (G. H. Rendall's trans.).

[2] For parallelisms of language and thought with the N.T., see Sharp, *Epictetus and the New Testament*.

forms as evidenced by a sense of the value of self-repression and self-conquest. Yet the appeal of Christianity in its earlier stages was not to the educated and philosophic mind, but to the people untouched by Stoic thought and unlearned in the wisdom of the world. 'Not many wise men, not many leaders, not many of noble birth were called,' as St. Paul had reminded his Corinthian readers: and Celsus[1] was not far wrong when he said that one of the rules of the Christians was, 'Let no educated man enter, no wise man, no prudent man: for such qualifications we deem evil: but whoever is ignorant, whoever is simple let him come and be welcome.' Let us grant this: but also let us not forget that Christianity appealed to the intellect as well as to the heart and absorbed certain elements into its 'many-coloured wisdom,' which have never been lost and which in their combination marvellously fitted it to become a world-faith. Israel gave to Christianity its lofty monotheism: Greece, with its passion for intellectual truth and beauty, gave its philosophy, its search for one principle, its doctrine of the Logos: the East gave its mysticism, its symbolism and its yearning for the Absolute: and finally, Rome, with her imperial system, set the model to the earliest Christian society of an external organisation which the lapse of ages has but slightly modified.

[1] Cf. Origen. *c. Cels.* iii. 44.

# THE ATTITUDE OF THE IMPERIAL AUTHORITIES TO CHRISTIANITY

'I am the wheat of God : suffer me to be ground by the teeth of beasts to become the white bread of Christ.'

IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH.

O fortissimi ac beatissimi martyres ! o uere uocati et electi in gloriam Domini nostri Iesu Christi : quam qui magnificat et honorificat et adorat, utique et haec non minora ueteribus exempla in aedificationem Ecclesiae legere debet, ut nouae quoque uirtutes unum et eundem semper Spiritum Sanctum usque adhuc operari testificentur, [et] omnipotentem Deum Patrem et filium eius Iesum Christum Dominum nostrum, cui est claritas et inmensa potestas in saecula saeculorum. Amen.

PASSIO S. PERPETUAE.

'Your sentences brand nothing but the confession of Christianity : there is no mention of a crime : the only crime is the name of Christian : here is the real ground of the universal hatred against us.'

TERTULLIAN.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE ATTITUDE OF THE IMPERIAL AUTHORITIES TO CHRISTIANITY

**The Neronian persecution.**

It has already been noted that Tiberius instituted a persecution of the votaries of Isis: he also expelled the Jewish colony from Rome about a decade before the death of Christ. Such acts of fiery nationalism were only a temporary phase of the imperial policy. Judaism still retained the status of a *religio licita* which had been accorded to it by Julius Caesar. In 52 Claudius again banished the Jews: how far the edict went can hardly be discovered: but his successor Nero reversed the policy of his predecessors by proclaiming the worship of the Greek Isis a *religio licita*. At the same time, this extraordinary person incurred the everlasting stigma of initiating a persecution against the new sect of the Christians: and thus began a state-policy which was to last intermittently for two centuries and a half. A disastrous fire on July 19th, 64, had destroyed a considerable part of the congested quarters of Rome: a scapegoat was required to account for this calamity, and Nero with diabolical ingenuity fastened the guilt on the Christians.

**The Christians regarded as anarchists.**

As the result of Nero's malignant action, the Christians were henceforth regarded as foes of society: their sect

was a sect of anarchists. Up to this point, they had received a certain amount of protection, largely because they were regarded as Jews. But the Jews themselves had turned against them as a definitely gentile community professing a faith subversive of the law. Hence the state had no compunction in treating the Christian cult as a dangerous superstition, and its votaries —already detested for the abominations they had perpetrated—as enemies of the imperial order, and indeed of civilisation.[1] It is of the utmost importance to grasp the fact that the profession of Christ was a *political* offence, and was regarded as such by the successors of Nero, Titus, Domitian and the Antonines. This fundamental misunderstanding on the part of Roman officialism involved the Christians in serious disabilities. As anarchists, they were liable to summary arrest, and the magistrates were empowered on their own responsibility to proceed against them as political offenders, and to condemn them out of hand. Thus, a private trial might easily result in the *humiliores*, or base-born, being sent to the lions or burnt alive: while for the *honestiores*, or upper-classes, was reserved the penalty of beheading. Christianity was recognised as a standing offence, but action hostile to it on the part of the authorities was not continuous or uniform. There were periods of negligence or leniency. A local magistrate might easily be of a tolerant disposition—a Gallio in fact: the weight of prejudice varied with the individual: hence there was something incalculable in the treatment of the Christians. Yet it is certain that the person of a Christian was always suspect in the eyes of the law.

[1] See Tac. *Ann.* xv. 44, 'odium humani generis.'

**Were the Christians regarded as a secret society ?**

Though Christianity was not to be recognised for nearly three centuries as a *religio licita*, this disability did not affect the unity of the Christian society in the empire. Rather was the persecution to which it was subjected an eloquent witness to the stability and strength of a faith which was to overcome the world. It is sometimes argued that the Christians, by virtue of their close organisation, fell under the imperial ban : did they not present all the features of a secret society ? This impression has to be safeguarded by the statement that Rome did not object to sodalities or clubs of any sort, provided that they were duly registered under forms allowed by law : indeed, the fact that the Christian society did not avail itself of this privilege and was not registered as a club seems to have weighed little with the state authorities who had other grounds for proceeding against them. In the third century the Christians did enrol themselves as burial clubs [1] (*collegia funeraticia*), but the stigma of political anarchism was not thereby nullified, and persecution continued as before. Indeed, we can hardly doubt that the privacy of Christian worship, the mysteriousness of their rites and the general aloofness and reserve of their attitude to secular interests (when added to the fact that no attempt was made by the Christians to obtain state-recognition for their faith), contributed not a little to the general prejudice.

**The charge of atheism.**

Still more important as a reason of the state hostility was the fact that Christianity was regarded by Rome, tolerant of all faiths, as standing in a class by itself.

[1] See De Rossi, *Rom. Sott.* i. p. 103 (ed. Northcote and Brownlow).

There is truth in the famous sneer of Gibbon: 'the various modes of worship which prevailed in the Roman world were all considered by the people as equally true, by the philosopher as equally false and by the magistrate as equally useful.' But Christianity was not like the other faiths: it held a solitary position: it never compromised itself. Not only was it not a *religio licita* —a faith authorised by the state—but from the first it refused the state-worship and paid no reverence to the state-gods. A votary of Isis or Mithra had no compunction in sharing the proper respect to the deities of the Roman religion. The Christian acknowledged no god but his own: indeed, he went further than a mere negative position in regard to these deities, and looked upon them as demons or devils. This was the crowning offence. 'They despise the temples as abodes of the dead, they scorn the gods, they mock sacred things.'[1] Hence, in the general opinion, they were nothing but atheists. And this opinion was undoubtedly correct. The Christian rejected the whole hierarchy of paganism, all its local polytheisms, and chief of all the imperial divinity, the deified emperor. He was at once, therefore, convicted of *laesa maiestas*, or high treason. In a word, as Harnack[2] says, 'Christianity tore up political religion by the roots.'

**Ignorant and prejudiced calumny.**

Added to this factor of atheism, and perhaps as its direct consequence, there was a general readiness to think evil of the Christian. Sinister rumours of 'secret crimes,' 'Thyestean banquets and Oedipodean intercourse,' and unnameable offences against morality, spread about the empire and found credence. The multitude, as we have

[1] Minucius Felix, *Oct.* cc. 8. 10. [2] *MEC*, i. 295.

seen, was prejudiced against the Jews as a peculiar people with religious forms and rites unique and unintelligible: but the Christians who were often confounded with them in the earlier empire evoked a more bitter animosity, and incurred a more unreasoning odium with the masses of the people. The Neronian persecution, utterly undeserved as it was and deadly in its immediate effect on the saints of both sexes—notable (like Paul and Peter) and obscure alike—had set in motion a prejudice which found its way equally into official and non-official quarters and rooted itself for generations in the popular mind.

**Typical examples of prejudice:**

**1. Pliny's correspondence with Trajan.**

It is not our purpose to dwell in detail on the glorious annals of individual martyrdoms,[1] but it may be useful to gather together from our available sources some typical examples of the attitude of the authorities to the faith. The younger Pliny was an educated and refined Roman gentleman, who in the year 100 had attained to the consular office, and eleven years later was sent by the emperor Trajan on a special mission to set in order the cities of Bithynia. In this province—the Armenia of to-day—he found many Christians, and, although hesitant in his policy concerning them, shows plainly his abhorrence of the name. He is appalled by the number of Christians who deserve the death penalty. This is his difficulty. The obstinate offenders are put to death: but what of those who recant their faith or have long abandoned it? The correspondence on this subject between

[1] The student is recommended to study, in addition to Workman's *Persecution in the Early Church*, the same author's *Martyrs of the Early Church*.

himself and the emperor is still extant. Trajan approves the action of his subordinate, while submitting that no general rule of action can be laid down. He counsels that the Christians should not be sought out, and all charges unsigned should be ignored: and further, while urging that every opportunity be given for denial of the faith and for pardon on repentance, he asserts that on conviction they must be punished. Thus, the Christian who refused to worship 'our gods' is doomed. It is interesting to compare Trajan's views with those of his successor in the purple, Hadrian.[1] Hadrian is fearful lest innocent persons be unjustly condemned. He deprecates hostile clamour and calumny: mere calumny deserves the severest penalty: and he insists on the proper legal formalities in the accusation of Christians, who are to be punished 'in proportion to the offences.'

**2. The letter from the church at Lyons and Vienne.**

Eusebius (*H.E.* v. 1) preserves a most valuable early document—the letter from the Christians of Lyons and Vienne in Gaul. It belongs to the age of Marcus Aurelius, and reveals a very cruel treatment of the Christians, who are forbidden access to the baths, the markets and any public place by the authorities. Not only so, but the examination of the accused is conducted in presence of the whole multitude. The aged bishop Pothinus, in spite of his ninety years, was hounded to death by the crowd, who overwhelmed the authority of the magistrates by their outcry. The account of the martyrdom of

[1] See letter in Euseb. iv. 9, who found it at the end of Justin Martyr's first *Apology*. More lenient still is the attitude of Antoninus Pius, whose epistle to 'the common assembly of Asia' is also preserved by Justin, *loc. cit.*

Blandina, Maturus, Sanctus and Attalus is one of the most moving and tragic narratives in early Christian literature, while at the same time we have a vivid picture of the miscarriage of justice, the weakness of the officials and the blind fury and dementia of the crowd. Nothing is done to sift the evidence or to treat judicially the charges of cannibal banquets and unnatural incest, which undoubtedly contributed to the popular irritation. The culprits are sought out and hauled before the chiliarch in complete contradiction to the advice Trajan gave to Pliny. Incidentally, it is worth noting that the letter is in Greek, that one of the martyrs—Attalus—comes from Pergamos in Asia Minor, that Blandina, most wonderful of Christian heroines, is a slave-girl, and that the accused reply either in Latin or in Greek—facts which bear witness to the cosmopolitan influence of the gospel.

A parallel, but less tragic document, written in Latin, is the official report of the trial of certain Christians from Scili in Africa, before the proconsul Vigellius Saturninus—belonging to the year 180,[1] and thus contemporary with the Lyons persecution. The trial took place at Carthage, and the proconsul—a second Pilate—is an amiable man who laboured to save the accused by asking them to swear by the Genius of the emperor. Speratus, who is the chief spokesman of the band (three men and three women) and, by the bye, carries in a chest 'books and epistles of Paul, a just man,' adopts a determined tone. 'The empire of this world I know not: but rather

[1] Twenty-three years later two young women—Perpetua and Felicitas—together with a company of neophytes or catechumens, were martyred at Carthage. Duchesne, *EHC*, i. 286, describes the story of the martyrdom, written almost entirely by Perpetua herself—*Passio Perpetuae*—as 'one of the gems of early Christian literature.'

I serve that God *whom no man hath seen, nor* with these eyes *can see.* I have committed no theft: but if I have bought anything, I pay the tax: because I know my Lord the King of Kings and Emperor of all nations.'

PROCONSUL, - - - Be not partakers of this folly.
CITTINUS, - - - We have none other to fear save only our Lord God, who is in heaven.
DONATA, - - - Honour to Caesar as Caesar: but fear to God.
VESTIA, - - - - I am a Christian.
SECUNDA, - - - What I am, that I wish to be.
PROCONSUL (*to Speratus*) Dost thou persist in being a Christian?
SPERATUS, - - - I am a Christian.
And with him they all agreed.

All are ordered to execution: whereupon all say 'Thanks be to God.'[1]

It is a document full of life and reality, and it reveals among other things the pertinacity and obstinacy of the Christians upon which Pliny had remarked: without doubt admirable, though on occasions it reveals the unpleasant side of fanaticism.[2]

The persecutions under Decius and Diocletian in the second half of the third century were specially fierce. There is extant in Greek a certificate given to a Christian who, in the Decian persecution of 250, gave the required submission by sacrificing to the gods and making a libation. This *libellus* in favour of a certain Aurelius Diogenes shows how systematic the imperial procedure was, and how a mere verbal recantation of Christianity

[1] See Robinson, *Texts and Studies*, i. 2 (Appendix).

[2] *E.g.* a certain Eulalia spits in the praetor's face. Cf. Prudentius, *Perist.* iii. 126-7.

did not avail the Christian who wished to escape the extreme penalty of the law.[1]

**Tertullian's witness to the political loyalty of the Church.**

There is a passage in Tertullian, a most illuminating and powerful defender of the faith, which proves conclusively that the Christians had no quarrel with the emperor, the imperial officials or magistrates as men, nor indeed with the imperial system in its secular aspects: they cheerfully rendered to Caesar the things that were Caesar's, and regarded the powers that were as ordained of God. 'We pray always for the emperors that they may have a long life, a safe rule, a family free from danger, courageous armies, a faithful senate, loyal subjects, a peaceful world, all that a man and a Caesar pray for.'[2] On the other hand, the Christians would have nothing to do with the imperial cultus. With merciless logic Tertullian satirises the deification of the emperors on the ground that they were man-made gods: the deities of orthodoxy had no use for them, and even if they were honest and pure and good, how many better men—a Socrates or an Aristides, a Scipio or a Pompey—had been left in a lower world? If there were a great god that deified men, he must have been in a desperate hurry, and was probably even then blushing to hear the complaints of better men who had never been exalted from Hades![3] But emperor-worship remained till the days of Constan-

[1] For the original text see Gwatkin, *Selections from Early Christian Writers*, p. 145.

[2] See *Apology*, xxx. This is a work which every student of early Christianity should read. J. E. B. Mayor's edition, with admirable translation by A. Souter, is the best available.

[3] *Op. cit.* xi.

tine, impervious to such ironies. It was the crowning offence of the Christians—this refusal to worship the state-deity—and by itself explains how persecution, although its spasms of ferocity were succeeded by intervals of leniency, never really died down during the first three centuries and was a constant menace to the tranquil progress of the individual Christian and the Christian community alike.

# SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS LIFE OF THE CHRISTIAN BROTHERHOOD

It is true that Socrates, like Christ, formed a sort of society. and that the successors of Socrates formed societies which lasted several centuries—the Academy, the Porch, the Garden. But these philosophical societies merely existed for convenience. No necessary ties bound the members of them together. . . .

Christianity abhors isolation : it gathers men into a society and binds them in the closest manner, first to each other and next to Christ himself. . . . He gathered all men into a common relation to himself, and demanded that each should set him on the pedestal of his heart, giving a lower place to all other objects of worship—to father and mother, to husband or wife. In Him should the loyalty of all hearts centre : he should be their pattern, their Authority, their Judge. Of him and of his service should no man be ashamed, but to those who acknowledged it morality should be an easy yoke and the law of right as spontaneous as the law of life : sufferings should be easy to bear, and the loss of worldly friends repaired by a new home in the bosom of the Christian Kingdom : finally, in death itself their sleep should be sweet, upon whose tombstone it could be written " Obdormivit in Christo."

SEELEY.

## CHAPTER V

### SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS LIFE OF THE CHRISTIAN BROTHERHOOD

It is not easy to present a picture of the inner life of the new society which will be truly representative. In the first place, the empire included East as well as West, and, just as to-day, the life of the Christian is modified by local and climatic differences in its habits and observances, so it was in the second and third centuries. In some cities like Eumenea in Phrygia there was a prevailingly Christian atmosphere: in others, the Christian community was a tiny group in a centre of paganism. Again, local conditions in certain districts were more favourable to a swift development of Christianity, so that a larger and more elaborate organisation brought Christian life and worship more openly before the public eye. Certain features in the secular life of a Christian, in its relationship to its pagan environment, may be postponed to a succeeding chapter while we roughly sketch the career of the average convert.

**Baptism.**

Whether he came from the slave or freedman class, whether an ordinary citizen or a member of the highest order of society, such as senator, the new convert would be expected to accept baptism as a public confession of

Christianity. In the earlier days of the Church, the desire to be a Christian and the full knowledge of the peril of professing the new faith was sufficient ground for not delaying the initial rite of incorporation. Later on, a preliminary instruction or catechumenate was established over a probation of three months, which tended to become longer as the Church developed. According to Justin Martyr, our earliest authority, the candidate declared his 'belief in the truth of our teachings and his willingness to live accordingly.'[1] He was then taken to a place where there was water and baptised by immersion in the name of the Trinity (using the baptismal formula of our Lord, Matt. $28^{19}$). There is no evidence that infant baptism was not practised in the apostolic age, though adult baptism at that time was the rule. The probability is that from the first the instinct of the Church did not deny the claim of a child to belong to Christ. Later on, when persecution ceased, the relation was reversed, and the baptism of infants with a resulting theory of regeneration by means of the rite became the rule, adult baptism the exception.

**Place of worship.**

**1. A house. 2. Catacombs.**

The new convert, thus recognised as having obtained 'in the water the remission of sins formerly committed,'[2] was expected to join in the common worship of the local Christians. The meeting place was in the earliest times a private house or a catacomb. The Christian mode of burial, to which the authorities extended a uniform tolerance, caused a special sanctity to attach to the burial place or cemetery. The most famous of the underground

[1] Justin Martyr, *Apol.* lxi. ; (cf. also *Didachê*, vi.-vii.) [2] *Ibid.*

crypts was the necropolis at Rome known as the Catacombs.[1] These consisted of a series of narrow galleries or corridors, often of great length and crossing at every angle, in the walls of which tombs or niches (*loculi*) were hollowed to receive the bodies of the dead. But in certain places the corridors opened out into chambers, which were doubtless family burying-places, readily accessible, entered by a wooden door and of all shapes and sizes—square, rectangular and polygonal. Some of these seem to have been expressly designed for other uses, such as the celebration of Christian worship, and especially of the Eucharist. There are many of these subterranean chapels or basilicas, one of the most complete being the crypt in the Ostrian cemetery, in which there is an apse with an elevated chair for the bishop and a lower bench for the presbyters. This part of the chapel known as the presbytery was architecturally separated from the nave, and along its side-walls were niches for sacred utensils. One of the earliest of these chapels, the so-called *Capella greca* in the cemetery of S. Priscilla, dating from the beginning of the second century, is without a special seat for priest or bishop: but has a tufa bench which runs along one side and part of another—an arrangement for seating communicants round a table carried in for the celebration of the Eucharist.[2] Undoubtedly the principal, and perhaps original purpose of these underground chapels was to commemorate the departed on the anniversary of death

[1] Note that the popular term 'catacombs' is never used of the whole cemetery, but only of parts. Catacombs are found elsewhere: *e.g.* at Cologne; cf. Lowrie, *Christian Art and Archaeology*, p. 41. De Rossi gives the word a hybrid derivation, half Greek and half Latin, meaning 'next the sepulchres,' but the etymology is uncertain.

[2] See Lowrie, *op. cit.* p. 44, to whom I am indebted for these details and others in this paragraph.

or burial, but it is clear that they were often used for regular worship, especially in times of persecution, and not a few of them were arranged with that definite object. What was a family sepulchre became, under Christian influence, a meeting place of the brotherhood of the faithful—an example of the new social and spiritual unity introduced by Christianity. When in the fourth century Christian churches began to be built, they were designed on the model of the Greek and Roman private dwelling-house, which in earlier days had served as a place of worship for the Christian community. The name given to these churches was 'basilica'—a word used by the Romans for any large and lordly building—and such a title, general enough to avert public suspicion, was interpreted by the Christians as referring to their great Basileus or King.[1]

**The agapê or love-feast.**

So much for the place of worship: but what of its forms? The earliest accounts show that a common meal was an essential element in the worship of the Lord's Day. It may be that in very early times this was the agapê or love-feast, which was a meal instituted by the Christians to show their unity and brotherly love on the model of Jewish and heathen customs. It was a general act of communion originating not improbably with the church at Jerusalem and carried on into the gentile Christian churches: but no definite evidence can be adduced on this point. Sooner or later it was merged into the Eucharist. At least, in

[1] The term 'basilica' was synonymous with *dominicum* (house of the Lord), a Latin word largely used in the West for the Christian church-building, of which the corresponding Greek word was *kyriakon*, from which our 'church' is derived.

the account given by one of our earliest authorities, the *Didachê* or *Teaching of the Apostles* (c. 14),[1] the Eucharist appears to include the agapê, while conversely in Ignatius (*Smyrn.* 8) the term agapê includes the Eucharist.

**The Eucharist.**

The early fusion of these two feasts is a reasonable inference from the scanty data available. The Eucharist as solemnly instituted by the Lord was found in practice to carry out the ideal which had been expressed in the agapê, a meal which had simply and effectively met the spiritual need of the earliest groups of believers. What the *Didachê* says (*loc. cit.*) is: 'On the Lord's Day of the Lord come together and break bread and give thanks after confessing your transgression, that your sacrifice may be pure.' Pliny, in his famous letter to Trajan, mentions the fact that 'on a fixed day' (probably Sunday) there was an assembly of the Christians before dawn, at which they sang by turns a hymn 'to Christ as to God' (or 'a god')[2] and bound themselves by an oath (*sacramento*) to abstain from certain crimes, and that later on the same day at another gathering they partook of an ordinary and harmless meal—a description which quite well fits the Eucharist. These are our earliest hints of worship outside the New Testament. For a fuller account we have to wait until the first *Apology* of Justin Martyr (see cc. lxv-vii). After a description (see *sup.*) of baptism, which he calls the Enlightenment because of its effect on

[1] For the *Didachê*, see art. in Hastings' *DAC.*

[2] In Tertullian, *Apol.* 2, the MSS. read *et* for *ut*: hence 'to Christ *and* to God' is the correct version: but the reading is probably a mistaken quotation of Pliny's words.

the understanding of the convert, he proceeds to state that a prayer-meeting was held by the brethren, who offered hearty petitions both for themselves and the newly-enlightened. Then came the holy salutation or kiss, and finally the Eucharist. 'There is then brought to the president of the brethren bread and a cup of wine mixed with water: and he taking them gives praise and glory to the Father of the universe through the name of the Son and the Holy Ghost, and offers thanks at considerable length for our being counted worthy to receive these things at His hands. And when he has concluded the prayer and thanksgivings, all the people present express their assent by saying Amen. . . . And when the president has given thanks and all the people have expressed their assent, those who are called by us deacons give to each of those present to partake of the bread and wine mixed with water over which the thanksgiving was pronounced, and to them who are absent they carry away a portion.' Surely a beautiful and simple ordinance far removed from the elaborate catholic ritual of the Mass which a later age was to produce.[1] Even more interesting is Justin's interpretation of the Eucharist as a partaking not of common bread and wine, but of food hallowed by prayer and thanksgiving which 'is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh'—an ambiguous statement which can be claimed by Romanist and Protestant alike in favour of their respective opinions. Justin, however, appears to be quoting the words of our Lord Himself and to be referring only to the commemoration and not to

[1] Tertullian, *De Corona Mil.* 3. 4, protests against such practices as the signing of the forehead with the cross in going out and coming in . . . and in fact, in every action of life: and his protest reveals a growing tendency to break away from a simple tradition.

the sacrificial significance of the feast.[1] A somewhat more advanced theory is given by Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, at the end of the second century, who maintains [2] not only that the bread is no longer common bread when consecrated, but also that it imparts immortality to our bodies. We may note one more interesting detail in Justin: he mentions the fact that 'the wicked devils' have imitated the usage of the Eucharist in the mysteries of Mithra, bread and a cup of water being used in the ceremony of initiation.

**Sunday worship.**

A happy feature of the early Christian social life is the help rendered to the needy (see *infra*, p. 125) by the wealthy. 'We always keep together,' says Justin, who proceeds to give an account of the worship held 'on the so-called day of the Sun,' *i.e.* on Sunday morning. There is first of all a reading of the 'memoirs of the Apostles or the writings of the prophets' (*i.e.* the Gospels and the Epistles) by an official called the reader. Then follows an exposition of the passage read by the president: to this succeeds united prayer and a celebration of the Eucharist. Finally, there is a collection which is deposited with the president, by whom it is distributed to orphans, widows, sick persons, prisoners, 'strangers sojourning among us,' and all who are in need. 'And we all hold our common meeting on

[1] But cf. *Dial. c. Trypho.* cxli. for an approximation to the view of the Eucharist as a sacrifice. Harnack has pointed out that the early use of the word 'symbol' denoted 'a thing which in some kind or way really is what it signifies.' Hence it was believed in that period that a heavenly element lay either in or behind the visible form without being identical with it (see *Hist. Dogma E.T.* ii. 144).

[2] See *Adv. Haeres*, iv. xviii. 4, and cf. articles in Hastings' *ERE* on 'Agapê' and 'Eucharist.'

the day of the Sun, because it is the first day on which God changed darkness and matter at the creation of the world, and Jesus Christ our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead.'

**Impression made by Christian worship on the pagan mind.**

It is difficult to gauge the impression which such a ritual would make on the pagan mind. Pater in his *Marius the Epicurean* has attempted to reproduce the sensations of a cultivated young Roman of the age of Marcus Aurelius on his first attendance at a Christian service: the result is a picture of great artistic beauty and serenity, which we may for a moment recall. Marius is imagined to be visiting in company with his Christian friend, Cornelius, the house of Cecilia, a widow of Cecilius, confessor and saint. The dwelling is situated near the Appian Way, and at the back there is an old flower-garden opening on a low hill, in which there is a door leading into a crypt, the family burial place of the Cecilii. Marius remembers the old Roman law which states that anyone may at his discretion constitute the place that belongs to him as a religious place by carrying his dead into it: and his first vision of the Catacombs with their imageries of peace and hope lifts his soul out of a jaded pagan world into a new atmosphere of healthy and joyous emotion. The impression deepens as he emerges into the open country under the stars with the antistrophic strain of the evening hymn 'Hail, gladsome Light' ringing in his ears. Later on he was to witness an actual Christian service in the *lararium*, or domestic sanctuary of the family of the Cecilii, where a congregation of all sorts and conditions assembles—the Roman ingenuus with his white toga and gold ring side by side with his slave—for wor-

ship and the Eucharistic meal. The singing of the Jewish Psalms, the offerings of wheat and grapes, bread, wine and oil by the people, the prayers, the united adoration of Christ, the approach of each worshipper to receive from the chief minister morsels of the great white wheaten cake and the singing of the final hymn, left on his half-emancipated heart the feeling that 'the natural soul of worship in him had at last been satisfied as never before.' Pater has chosen the case of one peculiarly susceptible by philosophic training and an innate love of the beautiful to aesthetic emotions, and fails to realise that to the mass of the people Christianity offered a new gospel of personal deliverance, appealed to the heart and conscience rather than to the intellect and senses, and made its worship, which was strange and awe-inspiring through its sheer simplicity, a real means of grace to the common soul of humanity.

**The Bible in the Church.**

The reference in Justin to the reading of Gospels and Epistles is interesting. The Old Testament was still the only Bible the Christians had: no writing of St. Paul, no gospel could as yet dispute its authority: perhaps, as v. Dobschütz [1] suggests, the book of Revelation as an apocalypse or purely prophetic writing might be placed on the spiritual level of the Old Testament. Yet the Pauline letters 'as well as those of the martyr Ignatius were perhaps collected in the lifetime of their authors, and the four Gospels were put together soon after the appearance of the fourth.' Then came the distinction between authoritative and unauthoritative books, and we get a list of *accepted* books—'canonical' is the technical

[1] Art. 'Bible' in *ERE.*

term afterwards in vogue—in the Muratorian Canon (date c. 170 A.D.). We may say that from 180 A.D. onwards the Christian Church was in possession of a Bible composed of the Old Testament and a second part afterwards to be known as the New Testament formed by itself. The union of the two Testaments in those early times illustrated the idea of historic continuity and progressive revelation which is stated so remarkably in the opening verse of the Epistle to the Hebrews: and the two parts of the Bible have maintained their unity unimpaired till to-day. It may be that we have reached a time when a break with the older pre-Christian religion is inevitable and when the New Testament shall be placed apart as the all-sufficient and crowning revelation of God, owing no part of its authority to its connexion with the records of the older faith.

**The creeds or formulae of confession.**

The Apostles' Creed, like the Canon of the New Testament, belongs to the fourth century. Up to that point, no universally accepted symbol of the faith was in use. Each local community had its own confession of belief to be employed in connexion with the baptismal rite. Probably, judging by New Testament hints, it was of the simplest order: 'Jesus is Lord,' or 'I believe in Jesus, the Son of God,' or 'I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.' Sooner or later the Triune formula of baptism which proclaimed 'the name' of Father, Son and Holy Ghost would open the way to further dogmatic developments: but still these formulae remained local. 'The same causes or considerations, which advanced the Bishops of Rome, Constantinople, Jerusalem and Alexandria above their fellows, naturally

advanced their diocesan creeds *pari passu*. As Rome drew to the front, its creed moved with it. In the fourth century the Roman Creed was still one among many: even in Italy, the churches of Aquileia, Ravenna and Milan, and in Africa those of Carthage and Hippo, cherished ancient forms of their own.'[1] The Apostles' Creed crystallised these local variations into one formula: but it was not till the eighth century that it assumed the final form familiar to us.

**Hymnology.**

In general, the forms of worship which were originally based on the synagogue model were now to develop on independent lines. The hymns sung were the Psalms of Israel and the other lyrics of the Old Testament: but in the department of hymnology the Church soon created definitely Christian hymns of praise. The recently discovered *Odes of Solomon*[2] were evidently intended for liturgical use, and may have been hymns intended for catechumens and the newly baptised. In the New Testament itself (*e.g.* Eph. $5^{14}$, 1 Ti. $1^{15}$, $3^{16}$, $6^{15}$ f., 2 Ti. $2^{11-13}$ and elsewhere) we discover echoes of 'spiritual songs,' and from Pliny's testimony we learn how the Christians of Bithynia sang an antiphonal (*secum invicem*) song at their early worship. Two hymns have come down to us from this age, the evening hymn 'Hail, gladsome Light' and the corresponding morning hymn the *Gloria in Excelsis* found in the English communion service,

[1] See W. A. Curtis, *ERE.* art. 'Confessions,' for further details, and the relation of the Apostles' to the Nicene Creed, and what Luther reckoned a good third, the *Te Deum*. Some critics support the view that in its earlier Latin form the Apostles' Creed is as early as 140.

[2] See *Texts and Studies*, viii. 3 (Ed. J. H. Bernard).

and called 'the great Doxology.' All these were in Greek. It is not till the age of Ambrose that we get the Latin hymns so familiar to us from their renderings in most hymn books. Ambrose was Bishop of Milan in 374, and Augustine in the well-known passage of the *Confessions* (ix. 7) describes how his loved teacher inaugurated the custom of hymn-singing to cheer the people in their long vigils during the Arian controversy, and in a subsequent chapter (ix. 12) tells of the comfort brought to himself by recollection of Ambrose's hymn *Deus Creator omnium.*[1] The Christians had, in fact, from the first expressed the joy of a new-found deliverance in a 'new song, fashioned and chanted under the inspiration of a Saviour,' whom Clement of Alexandria called the 'Orpheus-Christ.'

**Atmosphere of freedom, joy and love.**

The preaching, of course, differed *in toto* from the old Jewish model, because its theme was Christ. We can see a sample of it in the so-called Second Epistle of Clement, which was apparently preached at Corinth about the middle of the second century. If, according to Gwatkin, it strikes us 'poor stuff,' nevertheless it was the proclamation of a new gospel which all might listen to without let or hindrance. No restrictions barred the worshipper from attending the Eucharist, though actual participation was permitted only to the baptised. It was only in a later age when the sacrament had assumed the character of a 'mystery' that even the sight of it was forbidden to any but the baptised or the higher order of penitents. The earlier Christians

[1] See 'Hymns' (Greek Christian), by A. Baumstark, in *ERE.* Cf. 'Hymns' (Latin Christian), by G. M. Dreves, *ibid.*

rejoiced in a sense of freedom—of their eligibility, however unworthy, for the unsearchable riches of Christ. Not only in the great cities of the empire, but in the smaller towns and villages, the Christian society appealed to and satisfied a social instinct which the older religions and even the newer cults hardly affected. No doubt there were clubs and guilds of the votaries of Isis and Mithra, but there was in them no compelling force of fellowship. An individual relationship between the purified and the divine power that had purified him was all that resulted. There was no human nexus with other souls. Faith and hope were provided for: but the greatest of these—love—was conspicuously absent.[1] On the other hand, Christianity gathered its converts into a joyous and happy atmosphere of mutual sympathy and good will. They not only enjoyed a communion of the spirit which made them members one of another, but also a power which created an altogether wider interest in the human family—regardless of nationality and social status—and discovered to them a brotherhood in which the discords of life tended to vanish away under 'One Lord, one faith, one baptism.'

**Unity of government under a single episcopus.**

We have already noted (p. 24) that Ignatius of Antioch, himself an overseer or bishop, strongly advocated in the Church life the system of a single headship in the person of the 'bishop.' Thereafter this term was applied to the chairman or chief of the local council of presbyters: and, with the passing of the original apostles, who owed their commission to Christ, the original threefold order of apostles, elders or bishops and deacons was trans-

[1] Cf. Duchesne, *EHC*, p. 144.

formed into (1) bishop, (2) elders and (3) deacons.[1] We can gather nothing from Ignatius about the principle or method of appointing the bishop: but there can hardly be any doubt that he was elected to the position by the local church, though such selection may have been subject by a later development to the approval of a body composed of the bishops in charge of churches in the same district or province. Local congregations would tend to fall into groups—as we see in the Pauline epistles, *e.g.* the churches of the Lycus—and where a large city was situated in a neighbourhood with surrounding churches a certain prominence would attach to the person of its bishop. Hence, in the second century we have signs of the process by which the bishop of a capital city in a province became a 'metropolitan' with supremacy over the other bishops. In some places like Egypt the development of the monarchical episcopate was slow: it began in Alexandria, and it was natural that the bishop of that city should be for a time the bishop of Egypt, though at the same time the presbyters retained their right of choosing and consecrating their bishop. The metropolitan constitution of the episcopacy paved the way to the imperial, whereby the bishop of Rome became 'the bishop of bishops' (*episcopus episcoporum*) as Ter-

[1] The traditional theory of apostolical succession is now abandoned by most scholars as without authority in the New Testament. There is nothing in Scripture to support the view that the historic episcopate has descended through the ages in unbroken succession from the apostles as its founders, and that it is an essential attribute of the Church on earth in the sense that where there are no bishops, there can be no church. As Dr. Percival, the Bishop of Hereford, once stated to a Diocesan Conference, the theory, notwithstanding its mystic attraction and venerable associations, 'had been built on a misunderstanding,' and 'rested on no scriptural or historic foundation.'

tullian names him. The synods in the first instance, composed of laity as well as bishops and afterwards only of bishops, furnished the model of the oecumenical council summoned by the emperor to discuss the terms of the orthodox creed at Nicaea in 325.[1] Suffice it, therefore, to say that the Ignatian episcopate is the germ of the Catholic system of Christianity with its distinction between the clergy and the laity, between the authorised priesthood and the members of the Church who no longer were to be regarded as holding equal spiritual prerogatives with the officials as 'a royal priesthood.' From the episcopacy grew up by steady stages the vast disciplined unity of the Church. The local church under a bishop now became part of a greater whole, a world-confederacy of churches united under a common government and ministry, holding a common standard of doctrine and interpretation, with a body of Holy Scriptures sanctioned as a 'canon' of the common faith, and finally, exercising the same system of discipline in cases of moral delinquency. Undoubtedly the mere constitution of the Church on these lines caused it to become an impressive safeguard of the faith. Christianity was welded into an organisation of admirable stability and extraordinary power in the Roman empire. No emperor, at least at the beginning of the fourth century, could ignore its vitality which had remained unimpaired by the bloody persecutions of the past: and when Constantine in the famous edict of Milan in 313 set free Christian worship from all imperial disability and restored to the Christians 'the places at which they were used formerly to assemble,' whether purchased or given, however sincere his goodwill to the Christian religion,

[1] Cf. Harnack, *Constitution and Law of the Church* (E.T.), cc. iii. and iv.

he was taking an inevitable step towards the promotion of imperial prosperity and peace. What the Church had lost in spontaneity and liberty of action and thought, it had gained in unity and discipline as the result of the form of Church government which Ignatius had so strongly commended.

**The beginnings of monasticism.**

While the growth of priestly power and the exercise of priestly discipline tended to restrict the free operation of the spirit within the Christian society, this development was not permitted to proceed without protest. In addition to the Montanist movement with which we deal in c. vi. when discussing Tertullian, the rise of the monk and the solitary, as we see from *The Life of Antony*, was an impressive and significant reaction from sacerdotalism. For Antony, who in 270 founded in the Nitria, Lower Egypt, a monachist community, was a layman who, during his twenty years of seclusion, can never have received the Communion.[1] After hearing the story of the rich young man in St. Matthew's Gospel, he had at the age of twenty sold all his belongings and put himself under the direction of an ascetic in order to accustom himself to the practice of Christian renunciation. For twenty years he lived with his disciples the life of a 'hermit' or 'anchorite.' Then he visited Alexandria in order to strengthen the brethren during the persecution of Maximian, and later on again, in order to refute the errors of Arius. He visited also the hermit communities established by his disciples in the desert. But with these exceptions, he

[1] Duchesne, *EHC.* ii. p. 390; and cf. 'Monasticism' art. in *ERE*, and Workman, *Evolution of the Monastic Ideal*, p. 353 f., for the *Life of Antony*.

maintained the practice of seclusion, and was a desert dweller until 356 or possibly later, when he died, aged 105. Asceticism had passed into Christianity long before the experiment of Antony : it had its roots not only in Jewish customs, but also in the Greek religion and philosophy which had invaded the Graeco-Roman world. Fasting and other forms of physical abstinence, as we see from the writings of both the Greek and Latin fathers, were advocated by Christian teachers and practised by individual Christians : but the monachist movement made asceticism a rule of life,[1] and in the *coenobia* or hermit communities of the Nitria established by Antony we have the germ of monasticism—a phase of Christian life which for good or evil was to influence the evolution of the Church for centuries, and which was to enshrine an ideal of renunciation in its service of God and humanity.

[1] See art. 'Asceticism' (Christian), *ERE*.

# EARLY INTERPRETERS AND DEFENDERS OF CHRISTIANITY

Across the Night of Paganism, Philosophy flitted on, like itself, the Lantern-fly of the Tropics, a Light to, and an Ornament, but alas! no more than an ornament of, the surrounding darkness. Christianity reversed the order. By means accessible to all, by inducements operative on all and by convictions, the grounds and materials of which all men might find in themselves, her first step was to cleanse the *Heart*. But the benefit did not stop here. In preventing the rank vapours that steam up from the corrupt *Heart*, Christianity restores the *Intellect* likewise to its natural clearness. By relieving the mind from the distractions and importunities of the unruly passions, she improves the *quality* of the understanding: while at the same time, she presents for its contemplation Objects so great and so bright as cannot but enlarge the Organ by which they are contemplated. The Fears, the Hopes, the Remembrances, the Anticipations, the inward and outward Experience, the belief and the Faith of a Christian, form of themselves a philosophy and a Sum of Knowledge, which a Life spent in the Grove of Academus or the 'painted porch' could not have attained or collected. The result is contained in the fact of a wide and still widening Christendom.

S. T. Coleridge.

## CHAPTER VI

### EARLY INTERPRETERS AND DEFENDERS OF CHRISTIANITY

**Interpretation of the faith.**

The first interpretation of the new faith is to be found within the New Testament, more especially in the Pauline epistles and the fourth Gospel and other Johannine writings, all of which are the fruit of the primitive Christian experience. One is conscious of a certain inferiority alike of thought and inspiration in the non-canonical writers. Yet such works of the 'Apostolic fathers'[1] as the epistles of Clement of Rome and of Ignatius and the Shepherd of Hermas are sound expositions of Christian faith and practice. They may lack the creative gift and insight: but they furnish proof of the fact that at least some of the typical ideas and conceptions of the faith at an early period had rooted themselves in the Christian consciousness. In an alien atmosphere of suspicion, distrust and criticism, the Christian speedily became aware that he would have to give a reason of the hope that was in him. The facts and implications of his belief belonged to a supernatural order, and it became an urgent duty to

[1] The list of works under this title is: Clement's Epistles i. and ii., the epistle of Barnabas, the fragments of Papias (preserved by various early writers), the epistle of Diognetus, the seven epistles of Ignatius, the epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians, the martyrdom of Polycarp and the Shepherd of Hermas (visions, mandates and similitudes).

vindicate the reality of these unseen sanctions and powers by which his life of thought and action was controlled. Hence the activity of these writers, known as 'Apologists' from the character of their writings, each of which was in some sense an *apologia* or defence of the Christian faith. Indirectly also this literature bears witness to the widespread interest in the new religion awakened among all classes: and it is noteworthy that at least seven are apologies addressed directly to emperors.[1] Some of these are only known to us by extracts from their writings in Eusebius, to whom we may turn for a moment, though not himself an apologist so much as a historian and biographer.

**The first church historian, Eusebius of Caesarea.**

Eusebius of Caesarea had, indeed, the intellectual and theological gifts which fitted him to be a great expositor and defender of the faith: but his chief claim to our gratitude lies in the fact that he was 'the father of ecclesiastical history.' Born about 260 A.D., he spent the eighty years of his life in literary and ecclesiastical labours, the value of which cannot be overestimated. The terrible persecution under Diocletian resulted in the burning and destruction of an enormous mass of sacred literature: and had it not been for the painstaking researches of Eusebius—more particularly in Palestine—our knowledge of the first two centuries of the Church would have been very fragmentary indeed.[2] He belonged to the Alexandrian school of thought, and was especially influenced by Pamphilus, the pupil of Origen: he was a thinker, a

[1] Quadratus, Aristides, Justin, Melito, Apollinaris, Miltiades, and Athenagoras are the apologists referred to.

[2] See J. B. Lightfoot's art. 'Eusebius of Caesarea' in *DCB.*

theologian, a commentator, a preacher, an ecclesiastical leader, a historian, a biographer and a letter-writer. On the accession of Constantine he was the outstanding figure of the Christian Church, and was selected to deliver the inaugural address when the emperor presided at the Council of Nicaea in 325. His *Ecclesiastical History* is a remarkable achievement because of the excellence of his materials and his general sincerity as a historian. There are no doubt defects—credulity, lack of the critical spirit, a tendency to hasty and ill-considered influence and carelessness in quoting his authorities—but the positive value of his work is so high that these blemishes hardly discount the greatness of his achievement.

**Quadratus.**

The earliest apologist whose name is preserved by Eusebius is Quadratus. Of the author we know nothing, and but a brief extract from his apology to the Emperor Hadrian (117-138) is preserved. This, however, significantly enough deals with the problem of the gospel miracles—a theme which has never become obsolete. Says Quadratus, ' Our Saviour's works were always present: for they were true ': and he proceeds to demonstrate their credibility from the actual existence of the healed and the raised who ' not only during the Saviour's stay upon earth, but also after His departure remained for a long time so that some of them came down to our own times.' [1]

**The letter to Diognetus.**

To the same time belongs that charming composition by an unknown writer, known as the Epistle to Diognetus.

[1] Euseb., *H.E.* iv. 3.

This is written with a force and eloquence that recalls St. Paul, while the glow of his enthusiasm in describing the Christians in the world can be felt by us to-day. 'They love all men and they are persecuted by all. They are ignored and yet they are condemned. They are put to death and yet they are endued with life. . . . What the soul is in a body, this the Christians are in the world. . . . The soul is enclosed in the body and yet itself holdeth the body together: so Christians are kept in the world as in a prison-house and yet they themselves hold the world together.' We feel the same glow also in his statement of the Incarnation. Christ is sent not to inspire terror by His sovereignty. 'But in gentleness and meekness has He sent Him as a king might send his son who is a king. . . . Dost thou not see men thrown to wild beasts so that they may deny the Lord and yet they are not overcome? Dost thou not see that the more of them are punished, just so many others abound? These look not like the works of a man: they are the power of God: they are proofs of His presence.'

**Aristides.**

A famous apology is that of Aristides—addressed, according to Eusebius, to Hadrian, but more probably to Antoninus Pius (138-161), if we accept the inscription in its original form. It is preserved in the *Life of Barlaam and Joasaph*, a Christian romance which is to be found in the works of John of Damascus (c. 730). The general tenor of this interesting document—well worth a perusal [1] —is an ethical comparison between the Christian and the worshipper of pagan deities, claiming that the Christians

[1] An excellent edition and translation by J. A. Robinson (*Texts and Studies*, i. 1) is to be recommended.

more than any other people on earth 'have found the truth, for they know God the Maker and Creator, in His only Son and Holy Spirit, and other god than Him they worship not.'

**Athenagoras.**

Somewhat similar is the theme of Athenagoras of Athens, who addressed to Marcus Aurelius an apology or *Supplication for the Christians*, showing the absurdity of the calumnies of atheism, Thyestean banquets, etc., and expounding with great beauty of diction and in almost classical Greek the doctrine of God and the morality taught by the Christians.

**Minucius Felix.**

Possibly Athenagoras influenced the form and matter of the dialogue called *Octavius*, composed in elegant Latin by Minucius Felix, a Roman lawyer (*causidicus*), about 180, who adopts much the same line of defence.

**Theophilus of Antioch.**

With the *Octavius* is to be compared the three books *ad Autolycum*, a conversation addressed to a heathen, and composed in Greek by Theophilus of Antioch. It contains, in addition to its exposure of calumny, some positive views on the age and superiority of the sacred Scriptures and the equal authority of the Evangelists and the Epistles of St. Paul.

**Miltiades, Apollinaris of Hierapolis, and Melito of Sardes.**

Eusebius (v. 17) introduces us to a writer called Miltiades, who, in addition to polemics against Montanists and Valentinian Gnostics, wrote an apology for 'Christian

philosophy.' Except in fragmentary quotations, these works have been lost, as were those of a voluminous writer and apologist, Apollinaris, Bishop of Hierapolis. To the same period—the age of the Antonines—belongs Melito of Sardes in Lydia, who wrote an apology to Marcus Aurelius, of which only fragments survive. The titles of his works [1] indicate a personality of intellectual and spiritual distinction, and awaken regret for the irreparable loss of writings which would have been invaluable witnesses to the Christian life and thought of his age. Incidentally too we may remark on the number of apologies reported to be addressed to Marcus Aurelius as if the Christian world regarded him as a Christian in the making, or at least worth converting to the truth.

**The apocryphal Gospels.**

Before discussing the greater and better known interpreters of Christianity, it may be fitting [2] to say something of the Apocryphal or uncanonical gospels, of which a large number are extant, complete or in fragments, either relating to the Birth and Infancy of Jesus—hence called Protevangelia—or covering the entire ministry of Jesus. The latter class include Jewish Christian gospels (*e.g.* Gospel of the Hebrews, Gospel of the Nazarenes, etc.) and such compositions as the Gospel of the Egyptians, the Gospel of Peter, the Gospel of Marcion and, above all, the newly-discovered Oxyrynchus fragments in papyri.

[1] See Bardenhewer, *Patrology*, p. 62.

[2] The reader is urged to study the very full and admirable article, 'Gospels (uncanonical),' by Dr. J. Moffatt in *DAC*. Of the apocryphal gospels and other uncanonical literature there is a useful compendium in *The Apocryphal and Legendary Life of Christ* by J. de Q. Donehoo, who has arranged his matter as a gospel harmony after the manner of Tatian.

Then there are Gospels of the Passion and Resurrection, such as the Gospel of Philip, the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Bartholomew. It is an immense field of study. The productions are interesting less for their intrinsic merit as literature than for the evidence they afford of the extraordinarily widespread and popular interest in Christianity. Some of them are mere pious romances or novelettes, others heretical brochures written to advance the tenets of a party or sect, and all of them owe their origin to the mingled piety and imaginativeness of early Christian writers (chiefly of the second century), who in this way supplied the demand for literature outside the classical authority of the canonical gospels. One really interesting feature is the preservation of traditional sayings of our Lord (*agrapha*, or 'unwritten,' so-called because absent from the canonical gospels).[1] The whole of this literature, if we may repeat what has been said already, is a proof of the curious interest of the multitude —'the man in the street'—in everything pertaining to Jesus. The popular mind desired further light on His character and life in an age nearer the historical sources of information than our own, and this huge output of imaginative and inventive writing was the result.

**Justin Martyr.**

We have already quoted the famous *Apology* of Justin Martyr, the Christian philosopher and martyr, who was born about the year 100 in Palestine at Flavia Neapolis (Shechem), was converted to Christianity by an old man whom he met by the sea-shore and continued to wear the philosopher's cloak as a lay-missionary of the faith. He taught philosophy at Rome and was put to death (tradition

[1] See art. 'Agrapha' Hastings' *DB*, vol. v. with literature.

says under Junius Rusticus, Prefect of the city) between 163 and 167. Justin's rationale of Christianity was afterwards to be followed by the Christian Platonists of Alexandria—Clement and Origen. It set the type of thought current in the writings of the early Greek Fathers, according to which Christ was the Logos or Reason, in which every race of mankind shared. Even 'atheists,' like Socrates and Heraclitus, and 'barbarians' further back, like Abraham and Elijah, were Christians by virtue of their living association with the Logos. This was an argument that appealed to the Greek who thought in universals: it must also be added that it was the Greek mind that made it possible. Juvenal satirised the *Graeculus esuriens*, the starving Greekling, found all over the Graeco-Roman world: but he was a factor to be recognised in a world to be won to Christ; and, indeed, the order of intellectual life which he represented could not be overlooked: to neglect it would have been fatal, even if it had been possible to do so, with the potent thought of St. Paul at work in the Christian consciousness. Hellenism lifted Christianity out of the circle of narrow Jewish ideas and gave it a world outlook.

**Tatian.**

Eusebius [1] introduces us to an interesting 'hearer' of Justin called Tatian, author of the *Diatessaron*, 'a kind of combination and collection of the gospels,' in other words, a gospel harmony. His *Oratio ad Graecos*, which survives, is considered by Eusebius to be 'the most elegant and profitable of all his works,' and is, as a matter of fact, of extraordinary interest because of his attitude

[1] Cf. *H.E.* iv. 29. 6, Iren. *Adv. Haer.* i. 28. 1: and Glover, *Conflict of Religions*, p. 145f.

to Greek letters and philosophy. 'Born in the land of Assyria' (*i.e.* Mesopotamia) about 110 A.D., he was educated in Greek literature, had a rather speculative mind and became a wanderer over many lands as he himself tells us,[1] 'learning from no man.' He was initiated into the mysteries, but was revolted by the pagan licentiousness and cruelty, and finally abandoned the whole Greek system of ethics and religion. Then it was that he lighted upon some 'barbarian writings' (he means Christian), and was charmed by the modes of their diction and the easy naturalness of their writers. Henceforth he becomes a Christian: but not of the Justin type of thought based upon a connexion between Christ and Greek philosophy. On Greek culture and literature he pours out a stream of bitter denunciation. He is, in fact, a thoroughgoing Puritan and evangelical, content to live and die with the 'simple gospel.' In his own words, he was won 'by the assertion of the government of all by One Being.' The tyranny of the world of demons had come to an end and he was 'liberated from a thousand tyrants.' Glover (*loc. cit.*) reminds us of similar statements elsewhere, *e.g.* in Clement of Alexandria,[2] who says 'Orpheus sang to beguile men, but my Singer has come to end the tyranny of demons.' The God and Father of Jesus was a God to be known and loved and trusted. The writings of Ignatius, Clement of Rome and Barnabas bear witness to the same great truth: like St. Paul, these Apostolic Fathers trace everything to the name of Jesus. "'Jesus the beloved' is a phrase that lights up" the rather dull thought of Barnabas, while Ignatius exclaims,[3] 'You do not so much as listen to anyone if he speaks of anything but Jesus Christ in truth.' Unfortunately Tatian in 172 abandoned the

[1] See *Orat. ad Gr.* c. xxix. [2] See *Protrept.* 3. [3] *Ephes.* vi. 2.

true faith and joined the Gnostics: also he went back to the East and expounded Encratite tenets in the Syrian Antioch, Cilicia and Pisidia. A man of an independent order of mind, he was yet subject to sudden reactions which reveal an unbalanced temperament, 'moved to and fro by every wind of doctrine,' and always in peril of the falsehood of extremes. The date and place of his death are unknown.

**Irenaeus of Lyons.**

Standing between the sub-apostolic school of writers and the Greek Fathers of Alexandria, Clement and Origen, is Irenaeus of Lyons, and along with him may be mentioned his disciple Hippolytus, Bishop of Rome, a contemporary of Origen and famous as the antipope. Irenaeus, the successor of the martyred Pothinus as the Bishop of Lyons, may be called the first systematic theologian of the Church. He treats of the chief doctrines of Christianity with an intelligence and insight which still awakens our admiration. Though born in Asia Minor (c. 130) and though a Greek who had been familiar with Polycarp and the elders of the Asiatic churches, he made his way to Rome and became a public teacher there about 155 or 156: twenty years later he was priest and later bishop at Lyons. A fine linguist, able to converse and teach in the Gallic vernacular and in Celtic, he carried out the policy implied by his name ('Peaceful'), not only in his public labours but in the matter of his writing. Gnosticism had aroused against itself several writers of whom little is known, like Hegesippus, Rhodon and others, but Irenaeus is not merely a polemical anti-Gnostic writer. His great work, indeed, is the five books entitled *Against all Heresies*: but it is less polemic than its title, being

really constructive in character, in that he based his exposition of Christian truth on the New Testament writers and harmonised their teaching into the system of belief which finds expression in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. He is not a critic of the Scriptures, but a firm believer in their inspiration, regarding, for example, the four biographies of Christ as a foreordained and sacred arrangement, the four columns, in fact, upon which the Church rests.

**Hippolytus.**

Hippolytus, though belonging to a later period, is a figure of great interest, owing to self-revelations contained in the *Philosophoumena*, a work only discovered in 1842. Written in Greek like his master's great work, this *Refutation of all Heresies* (more widely known under the title of *Philosophumena*) reveals the interesting fact that Hippolytus, though for the most part strongly orthodox, was distinctly heterodox in his treatment of the Person of Christ, who (as he believed) only became the Son of God in the Incarnation. This produced a schism which did not spread, and indeed was ended by Hippolytus himself, who, as antipope, was later reconciled with pope Callistus. Hippolytus far outstripped his western contemporaries in erudition, while 'his works fill us with astonishment, so extensive and varied are they.'[1] Even from the fragments of his labours which survive, we can gather a clear impression of his great gifts. Like Irenaeus, he depended on the Scriptures as the foundation of his teaching, and regarded, in contradistinction to Justin Martyr, Greek thought as the fountain of all the heresies with which the Church was disturbed.

[1] Bardenhewer, *Patrol.* p. 212.

We may now turn to a brief survey of the Hellenised Christian thought which both these writers ignored or disparaged.

**Clement of Alexandria.**

Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-c. 214) is a Christian humanist gifted with a versatile and fascinating style. His identification of the Incarnate Logos with Jesus was a great and significant advance on the vague concepts of his teacher, Philo Judaeus, and altered for ever the significance of Christ's person in Christian thought. His *Pedagogue* is a series of admonitions to Christians belonging, as the internal evidence shows, to a refined and educated environment: indeed, it is the very circle from which Clement himself came, Greek and aristocratic. He is a lover of the old literature, and especially the poetry of Greece, as his *Stromateis* or Miscellanies (really Tapestries) show. They are notebooks of reflections and quotations, as the title signifies, bearing on philosophy and religion and full of curious information on cult and custom. Clement is essentially a man of culture, who desires to impress all the ancient thought and philosophy into the service of the gospel. To him Greek philosophy at its best was a foe of superstition and the champion of God's unity and goodness. This is the underlying theme of the *Stromateis*: but in his earliest work, the *Protrepticus*, a more intensive note is struck: there is the same charming discursiveness, the same characteristic ideas of his Christian Platonism: but the whole treatise, the title of which means 'An Exhortation to the Greeks,' is suffused by a glowing joy. 'We catch notes that come from Greek and Hebrew song, and the whole is woven into a hymn to "the Saviour," "my Singer," "our new

Orpheus," that for sheer beauty, for gladness and purity is unmatched in early Christian literature.'[1] It is this factor—the joyousness of one who finds joy in commending his Saviour to others—which makes Clement so impressive a writer: he is so evidently utilising all the art and poetry and beauty of the ancient order to win an interest in the new view of life which shows up the hidden perils and spiritual weakness of the wisdom of this world. He cries in effect, 'Abandon the ancient mysteries: Christ is the true mystagogue, the author of mysteries truly holy; "come unto Me all ye that are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest."'[2]

**Origen.**

Origen,[3] who is always linked with Clement of Alexandria, was born in Alexandria about 185, and in the catechetical school of that city was influenced by Clement's teaching. His theological and philosophical standpoint is the same as his master's: but he shows a deeper interest in the text and criticism of the Scriptures. He was a most voluminous writer, even if we reject Epiphanius' story about his authorship of 6000 books! Of his critical and exegetical powers the *Hexapla*, or six-fold Old Testament, is the chief monument—a great enterprise which embodies the principles of interpretation laid down in his earlier *de principiis*: while his *Scholia*, *Homilies* and *Tomes*—an enormous mass of scripture exposition—carry on the plan. For our immediate pur-

[1] See Glover, *Conflict of Religions in the Early Roman Empire*, chap. ix., for a fascinating account of Clement: also Biggs, *Christian Platonists of Alexandria.*

[2] See *Protrept.* xii. 120.

[3] Euseb. *H.E.* vi. gives a full account of the life and works of Origen.

pose we may specify from the catalogue of his other works his eight books *Against Celsus*—a valuable defence of the faith, from which we learn the main positions adopted by Celsus (see next chapter), but also realise how the invective of a skilful and bitter opponent of the faith was met in a calm and dignified fashion by one of the great Christian intellects of the age. The *Contra Celsum* is, indeed, the most able apology of the early Church alike in manner and matter.

**Tertullian.**

There remain to be mentioned two other great interpreters of Christianity, both of North Africa, the Latin Fathers Tertullian and Cyprian. The average reader of Christian history comes to the study of Tertullian prejudiced against him by the bitter sarcasms of Gibbon. A closer acquaintance with his works will reveal temperamental defects, but also a Christian thinker of outstanding power. Born in Carthage about 160, he was brought up to the pursuit of law and trained in rhetoric and the Stoic philosophy. His conception of the fixity and rationality of nature became the basis of his favourite argument concerning the *testimonium animae naturaliter Christianae*, the soul being naturally and essentially Christian and, like nature itself, embodying the teaching of its Creator. He wrote numerous treatises on heresy, Christian practice and discipline, but we shall confine our attention to his famous *Apology* already quoted. It was addressed to the governors of the empire in 197. The noble army of martyrs—possibly among them the Scillitan group (p. 57)—afford his chief argument in defence of the faith. The Christians are treated (he submits) worse than the criminals, who are tortured when they deny,

while the Christians are tortured to make them deny. The popular hatred is as utterly unjust as this travesty of legal procedure. Rumour alone is the foundation of the crimes of the Christians. Then follows a scathing condemnation of pagan religious rites and beliefs and an exposition of the Christian doctrine of God, 'the majesty of the Scriptures' and the divinity of Christ. 'We invoke on behalf of the safety of the emperors a God who is everlasting, a God who is real, a God who is living' (c. xxx.). The Christians are profoundly loyal. Tertullian proceeds to render an account of the actual occupations of 'the Christian association' (*Christiana factio*): worship; reading of Scripture; government by elders; a monthly gift for the poor, the prisoners and exiles; brotherliness; chastity; quietness; prayer. To do away with such people is a loss to the state. Their mere number is impressive. 'We are but as yesterday,' runs the famous assertion, 'and we have filled everything: cities, islands, camps, palaces, forum: all we have left you is the temples (c. xxxvii.). Yes, and 'we spring up in greater numbers the more we are mown down by you: the blood of the Christians is the seed of a new life. . . . The very obstinacy with which you upbraid us, is a lesson: for who on beholding it is not stirred to enquire what there is within it?' (c. l.). These quotations, scanty as they are, suffice to show that the *Apology* is not a piece of serene argumentation, but comes redhot from a heart which is very much in earnest—earnest with that healthy-minded, if somewhat narrow, intensity which the age needed. It hardly surprises that Tertullian with such a temperament should join the Montanists—a body of earnest people, enthusiasts for the purity of the faith, for the perpetual inspiration of the Holy Ghost and for the inner light as con-

trasted with (if not opposed to) a mediated and official religion of outward form and organisation. As a matter of fact, the sundering of faith from form was found to be impracticable, and the movement which bore fruit as a protest against a tendency to formalism died away when the followers of the Phrygian Montanus, who, true to his country's tradition, cultivated ecstasy and asceticism, reverted to mechanism and magic as a means of fostering the indwelling spirit of Christ.

**Cyprian.**

With the name of Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage in 248, we must close this rapid survey of interpreters from within. As against the Montanist puritanism, Cyprian stood for toleration in estimating degrees of guilt in offending Christians, while at the same time he expanded a severely sacerdotal view of the ministry and sacraments of the Church, and so advanced the catholicising tendency which had been steadily growing within the pale of the Christian community towards the end of the second century. No salvation outside the Church—was in effect Cyprian's view. He in fact said, 'He who has left the Church is an alien, a profane person, an enemy. He cannot have God for his Father who has not the Church for his Mother. If he could escape who was outside the ark of Noah, then he too will escape who was outside the Church.' [1] The world outside Christ's fold is rarely in his view, while apostacy from the faith is his *bête noire*. His writings deal with ecclesiastical and doctrinal questions: and, though no one can doubt the saintliness of his character, yet Gwatkin hits the mark when he pronounces that

[1] Cyprian, *De Cath. Eccles. Unitate*, 5, quoted in Gwatkin, *ECW*, p. 147.

Cyprian's general conception of religion is more heathen than Christian. In the ecclesiastical sense he was the first High Churchman of the Christian Church. From the standpoint of his personality, his name will ever be venerated. He left upon magistrate and governor, upon the pagan multitude and the Christian community, an impression of Christian gentleness and dignity which was deepened by his martyrdom. Historically, he is the predecessor of Augustine and the Latin conception of the Church. Tertullian, who received no canonisation at the hands of the Church, was a mightier force as a prophet and a leader of virile and burning zeal. Cyprian was duly canonised as a saint, and his memory was cherished by posterity (to use Augustine's phrase) as *catholicus episcopus, catholicus martyr.*

**The Fathers as personalities.**

We have emphasised the work of the Fathers as interpreters of Christianity to a hostile and scornful world rather than as theologians who placed or helped to place Christian doctrine on a secure basis. Thinkers like Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, Hippolytus and Origen did a great and useful work in spite of the errors which we of to-day can detect in their reasonings. The chief problem was the Incarnation, the Person of Christ and the formulation of a doctrine of God which did justice to the Trinitarian conception of distinctions in the Divine Being. This was a profoundly difficult task, and to the earlier thinkers the path to truth was beset with pitfalls. They did not escape the tendency to polytheistic definition. Christ becomes a second God in the attempt to expound His inferiority to the Father. Ditheism and tritheism are frequently suggested by the language in

which the three 'persons' are expounded. But such defects of terminology were almost inevitable in dealing with metaphysical realities, and in the preparatory work which led up to the final distinctions of the Nicene Creed the ante-Nicene Fathers achieved results which have justly won the admiration and gratitude of succeeding ages.

**The Fathers as personalities.**

In summing up our impressions of this roll-call of great names, let us not forget that they illustrate once for all the truth that Christianity was advanced more by sacrificial lives than by literary defence or by theological exegesis. To most of us the Fathers of the Church are rather dull and uninspiring representatives of an earlier stage of thought which the world has long outgrown, not to be read except by professed students whose business it is to grope among the dusty archives of the past. Let us in justice remember that they were also *men*—men of varying gifts, temperament, race and outlook—bishops, confessors, martyrs, philosophers—who yet were all 'captured,' as St. Paul would say, 'by Christ.' The first two centuries—meagre as the records are—at least present us with a goodly fellowship of exegetes, thinkers, theologians and defenders of the faith—converts for the most part from paganism, and called of God to consecrate intellect and soul to the task of winning a hostile world to the faith of Christ. Among the Fathers there were not a few of whom the world was not worthy, and it was more by their spirituality than by their intellectual powers, considerable as these were, that their chief work and witness was accomplished. If it be true that God has provided some better thing for us, looking back over

eighteen centuries we can truly say with the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews that this was in order that 'they without us should not be made perfect.' They laid the foundations of that holy city which is being built through the ages and has yet to be completed.

# THE VERDICT OF THE OUTSIDER

As the Jew going about to establish his own righteousness had not attained unto the righteousness of God, so the Greek, seeking for a wisdom which should be his own discovery, not a revelation of God's Spirit, had lost at every step what he seemed to be finding. The wisdom which he gained was in word, not in power. It had no power over his will. It helped him not to attain to the new life, to the emancipation from sense, to the resurrection of the dead. On his heart, in the study of his poets and philosophers, as upon the Jew's in the reading of Moses, the veil remained—the veil of self-regard and sensuous judgment. Poring on himself and looking askance on his fellow, his face was not open to the glory of the Lord, and hence was not changed into its image. When that glory was manifested in a body of humiliation in the baseness of the cross blinded by the shows of flesh he could not recognise it. It was foolishness to him. If the princes of this world crucified the Lord of Glory, its wisdom —or as we should say, its enlightenment and culture—had been no wiser. It had taken sides with the princes and thought scorn of the Crucified. Till its own flesh had been crucified—till it had ceased to be a wisdom of the world, *i.e.* a self-seeking wisdom, and become a wisdom of God—it could do no other.

THOMAS HILL GREEN.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE VERDICT OF THE OUTSIDER

If any proof be required to confirm the impression of the gradual and far from swift movement of Christianity to public recognition, it may be found in the paucity of allusion on the part of non-Christian writers during the first two centuries. The silence of certain contemporaries is striking, even when it is explicable.

**The silence of Josephus.**

Flavius Josephus was born in 37 or 38 : after an experiment in Essenism [1] he became a Pharisee, visited Rome in 64, became a general of the Jewish troops in the fight with Rome and surrendered to Vespasian, whose favour and patronage he enjoyed from that moment. Under the imperial protection he became a Roman citizen, and achieved wealth 'by obtaining the estates confiscated from his compatriots in Palestine after the conquest.' [2] He died about 100, six years before he published his *Jewish Antiquities*. The passage quoted by Eusebius (*H.E.* i. 11), in which Josephus refers to Jesus as a wise man, the Christ, and the author of the name which the sect of Christians received from him, is now regarded

[1] For the Jewish monastic order known as Essenes, see art. in Hastings' *DAC.*

[2] See Battifol, *The Credibility of the Gospel* (E.T.), p. 4 f.

as a fabrication introduced by a forger. If so, the only existing reference in the *Jewish Antiquities* is the casual allusion to 'a brother of Jesus who was called Christ.' How do we explain the silence? By the fact that Josephus was writing for Romans and, as Schürer points out, could only treat Christianity in the spirit in which it was treated later by educated Romans, such as Pliny and Tacitus. He owed his position to Roman patronage, and nothing must be said about an unpopular and despicable sect which would offend the susceptibilities of the empire.

**Plutarch ignores Christianity: so also the Stoic writers.**

Plutarch[1] 'the philosophic theologian,' of whom Sir S. Dill has written so charmingly, was a student in the university of Athens at the time of the Neronian persecution, and probably visited Rome in the reigns of Vespasian and Domitian. One of the most illuminating and delightful of writers—a Montaigne of the first century—he had a close knowledge of the religious thought and practice and custom of the past as well as a grasp of the ancient philosophies. He wrote a valuable treatise on Isis and Osiris, was a devout Stoic, discoursing delightfully on the ethics of the tranquil life, had a Platonic conception of the soul and God, accepted everything—the Delphic oracles, the mysteries, demonology, cult, charm and rite—that expressed man's yearning for the higher powers. But he was a genial eclectic, fusing the whole medley of religious practice and faith into an amalgam of picturesque and satisfying ideas: he lived

[1] See his *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius*, Bk. iii. c. iii., and cf. also Glover, *Conflict of Religions*, for a discriminating study.

in the past, and never alludes to the new truth that was to satisfy the everlasting need of the soul. The same is to be said of the two great Stoic thinkers—Seneca and Marcus Aurelius—who never penetrated to the great secret of Christ, and also of Epictetus—self-described as 'a poor man, a slave, a cripple, but beloved of the gods' —who makes no allusion to Christianity. They are a fascinating trio—the courtier, the emperor, and the slave—and each in his own way added an imperishable glory to the Stoic system, each laid the emphasis on conduct, discoursing of duty and virtue in terms that suggest an atmosphere already purified by the ideas of Christianity, and each makes us feel as if he were 'often our own'—the expression Tertullian[1] uses of Seneca. But there is no evidence of a direct contact with and knowledge of Christianity on the part of these philosophers.

**Tacitus.**

Tacitus, the greatest of the imperial historians, endowed at once with a passion for the old Roman *virtus* and a horror of its perversion in a Tiberius and a Nero, betrays his ethical bias in the sombre and bitter rhetoric with which he depicts the outstanding figures and movements of a reactionary age. His preoccupation as a moralist modifies the value of his work as a historian: yet his vivid imaginativeness, his gift of condensing a character or a policy in a half-a-dozen words of the tersest Latin, and his moral intensity, make his narrative live with the poignant force of a tragedy. Yet he does not appear to have been in sympathy with the Stoic ideal of life, nor indeed with any but the traditional form of religion,

[1] Tertullian, *de Anim.* 20.

the time-honoured cultus of the Roman people. It is clear that he knows nothing of Christianity from personal observation. The famous allusion quoted above (p. 7) is based on rumour alone, and merely reflects the popular opinion, while it serves to add another dark touch to his melancholy portraiture of a degenerate period.

**The younger Pliny.**

We have already noted above the famous letter to Trajan in which, as the imperial legate of Bithynia, the younger Pliny deals with the problem of the Christians. His correspondence reveals his strength and weakness in a remarkable fashion: 'upright and conscientious,' says J. W. Mackail,[1] 'but irresolute, pedantic and totally unable to think and act for himself in any unusual circumstances.' A typical Roman of his age, a lover of art and nature, a model of civic and domestic virtue, a faithful servant of the emperor and the empire, a writer of distinction, he can see nothing more in Christianity than a *superstitio praua immodica*—a superstition at once wicked and aggressive. He describes the attitude of the faithful as 'obstinacy and unbending perversity,' does not hesitate to put to torture two deaconesses in order to get at the real character of the Christian hetairiae or clubs, and bears witness to the fact that the contagion of the superstition has penetrated villages and county as well as towns. Incidentally his letter reveals something of the inner life of the Christian community, while at the same time it explains how difficult it was for even a high-minded Roman and devoted civil servant to exercise an independent judgment on the Christian faith.

[1] Cf. *Latin Literature*, p. 225 f.

**Suetonius.**

Suetonius, the secretary of Hadrian, wrote the *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, which, if not serious history, is still a valuable chronicle of the imperial age. Without any pretension to style, it is an interesting compilation of anecdote, gossip and scandal: but it contains only incidental references to Christianity.[1]

**Dio Cassius.**

Dio Cassius (b. 155), writing in Greek, compiled a history of Rome in eighty books, of which only the last twenty are preserved (chiefly in an epitome of Joannes Xiphilinus, a Byzantine writer of the eleventh century). In an interesting account of the persecution under Domitian he records the death of the consul Flavius Clemens and the exile of his wife, Flavia Domitilla, a kinswoman of the emperor, on the charge of 'atheism.' Many others 'who made shipwreck on Jewish customs' were either condemned to death or suffered confiscation of property, among them Glabrio, the fellow-consul of Trajan, who was put to death. Domitilla was a Christian, and it is probable that Clemens and Glabrio (consuls in 91 and 95 respectively) were Christians also.

**Lucian of Samosata.**

Within the period under our review there are two outsiders—the one a comic, wit and essayist, the other a rationalist critic, who in quite different ways reflect the opinion of the pagan mind on Christianity. Lucian of

[1] Cf. *Nero*, 16, where he speaks of Christianity as a 'new and pernicious superstition,' and *Claudius*, 25, of the expulsion of the Jews by Claudius: *Judaeos impulsore Chresto assidue tumultuantes Roma expulit.*

Samosata was born in 125 and spent his youth and early manhood wandering from city to city in Greece. These *wanderjahre* made him thoroughly conversant with Hellenic life and thought, of which he is a valuable critic and interpreter. Modelling his style on the classical Attic writers, he wrote the best Attic prose, according to the late Prof. R. C. Jebb, which had been written for 400 years. He finally settled in Gaul, where he devoted himself to rhetoric and literature. He has been compared with Aristophanes, Swift and Voltaire, and certainly has many points in common with each. He wrote on occasion serious essays like his stimulating *Patriotism*, and biographical sketches like his *Life of Demonax*: but the greater volume of his work consists of prose dialogues, marvellously witty and vivacious, fresh and fanciful, wherein he treats of the Greek religion, deities and philosophers in an entirely comic vein. He is an accomplished sceptic, with no interest in religion except as affording scope for satire, and he dissolves in mockery every spiritual idea, every aspect of superstition and every ethical system. Turn to his *Dialogues of the Gods* and you find a broadly humorous and subtly ironical sketch of the ménage of Olympus: or rather a series of sketches or scenes representing 'the Father of gods and men' much worried in his endeavours to keep his household in order. 'Now,' says Zeus, 'Asclepius and Heracles, stop that quarrelling: you might as well be men: such behaviour is very improper and out of place at the table of the god.'[1] He is the same in the *Zeus Tragoedus* and the *Zeus Cross-examined*: in the latter Zeus is worsted in an argument

[1] See *Dialogues of the Gods*, xiii. The quotations are taken from the spirited and excellent translation by H. W. and F. G. Fowler (Oxford: Clarendon Press).

about Fate with the blatant sceptic Cyniscus: and in the former he listens to a dialogue between two rival philosophers, in which the honours of the argument go to the atheist: and he would fain be comforted by the reflection of Hermes, who bids him put a good face on it. 'There are plenty,' Hermes remarks, 'who take the other view—a majority of Greeks, the body and dregs of the people and the barbarians to a man.' If the orthodox Greek faith is contemptuously rejected by Lucian, the current philosophies fare no better. In the *Hermotimus* Lycinus argues that Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, Chrysippus, Epicurus and the rest have all provided roads to happiness, and not one has proved genuine: and Hermotimus ends by blessing him for an argument that shows the futility of all their schemes of life. 'Henceforth, if I meet a philosopher on my walks (and it will not be with my will), I shall turn aside and avoid him as I would a mad dog.'

**Lucian's references to Christianity.**

It might be imagined that a mind of this order would favour a faith which rejected the polytheism of the pagan world and regarded its 'wisdom' as 'foolishness': [1] but Lucian lumps Christianity with all the other cults and systems upon which he pours his mockery. There are two references to Christianity which merit attention—one in *The Liar* (cf. 16), in which he holds up to scorn the pretensions of 'that Syrian adept from Palestine' to cure demoniacal possession. The other is in *The Death of Peregrine* (cf. 13)—a sprightly narrative depicting the career of Peregrine, otherwise Proteus, because of his many transformations for glory's sake, whose latest ambition is to perish on a pyre before all Greece. In

[1] Cf. 1 Cor. $3^{19}$.

the course of his wanderings 'he came across the priests and scribes of the Christians in Palestine and picked up their queer creed.' He became their president, and they took him for a god. 'The Christians, you know, worship a *man* to this day—the distinguished person who introduced their novel rites and was crucified on that account.' Proteus is arrested and sent to prison: the Christians try to secure his liberation. 'The activity of these people in dealing with any matter that affects their community is something extraordinary: they spare no trouble, no expense.' It is easy to impose on them. 'You see, these misguided creatures start with the general conviction that they are immortal for all time, which explains the contempt of death and voluntary self-devotion which are so common among them: and then it was impressed on them by their original law-giver that they are all brothers, from the moment that they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece and worship the crucified sage and live after his laws. All this they take quite on trust, with the result that they despise all worldly goods alike, regarding them merely as common property.' The conclusion is—they are easily imposed on by an adroit, unscrupulous fellow. To Lucian, therefore, Christianity is the faith of a curiously simple folk, and like Browning's Cleon he holds 'their doctrine could be held by no sane man': but Lucian is a universal sceptic, clever but superficial, who takes no trouble to understand either religion or philosophy. His Peregrine is a caricature: we have it on the evidence of Aulus Gellius[1] that the

[1] Quoted by Glover, *Conflict of Religions*, p. 213, from the *Noctes Atticae*—a compilation of extracts from older writers, and a kind of handbook to the literature and wisdom of the age, written by a contemporary of Suetonius.

man was in earnest in his study of the religions of his age, and probably burnt himself to death from quite another motive than spectacular effect. But this is Lucian all over: he can take nothing seriously which contradicted his own particular theory of what was fitting: he is an excellent example of St. Paul's 'natural' or psychical man, who is without the faculty of spiritual discernment.

**Celsus as critic of the new faith.**

While Lucian was not an adversary of Christianity except indirectly, Celsus stands out as a critic of the new faith with a definitely hostile bias. We know nothing of the man: even Origen, from whom all that we know of Celsus is derived, can tell us nothing of his personality and career beyond the fact that he was the author of the *True Word*. That the accusations of Celsus against Christians and their religion were not to be neglected, and had probably already taken effect, is demonstrated by the careful and serious refutation which Origen prepared in his *Contra Celsum*—a lengthy work in eight books, the whole of which is extant. Among the charges of Celsus which Origen undertakes to refute are these: that Christians have entered into secret and illegal associations; that Judaism, upon which Christianity is based, was barbarous in its origin; that there is nothing new in Christian morality; that Christians employ incantations and spells in expelling demons from possessed people; and that Christianity is contrary to reason.

**His scorn of faith and the gospels.**

Here Celsus betrays his ignorance or his misunderstanding of Christianity, because he makes much of the Christian's 'only believe'! Origen replies that the faith

of the Christian is not blind, and even if it is, it has produced miracles of moral reformation which raise the question whether it is not better to believe without reason than to remain in sin. Origen evidently feels that this is a vital matter, because he goes on to argue that even a seeker after truth attaches himself to a school of philosophy for no other reason than that he *believes* it to be superior to its rivals. The ordinary actions of life depend on faith. Moreover, Celsus disparages the Christian views without proper examination of the gospels : and, further, he is deeply prejudiced against the Jews, his object being to asperse the origin of Christianity. He introduces a Jew into the argument and invents a discussion between the Jew and Jesus—an adroit proceeding in that he represents the Jew confuting Jesus on many points, makes out that the Virgin birth is an invention of Jesus and disparages His humble and disgraceful origin. Origen's reply, which is based on the amazing success of Jesus in surmounting these alleged disadvantages, points out the improbability of the disciples facing death after the resurrection and leaving their country to preach the gospel, if Christ were a deceiver. Celsus is contemptuously brutal in his treatment of the Virgin birth, discredits the marvels of the baptism—the dove and the voice from heaven—defames 'the ten or eleven persons of notorious character' who were disciples, regards the miracles as juggler-tricks, and by the mouth of the hypothetical Jew concocts much calumny of the same order. Celsus is equally biassed against Christianity and Judaism, but does not hesitate to play up Judaism against the gospel, and endeavours to demonstrate the irrationality of the Jewish convert. Origen has little difficulty in pointing out the errors of Celsus, and shows an amazing logical skill and knowledge

of pagan literature, though his detailed method of reply lends itself to excessive repetition. Incidentally, his apology furnishes a large amount of valuable information about the inner life and thought of the Christian community.

**His vulgar calumnies and antisocial bias.**

Celsus not only denies the divinity of Jesus, but perversely slanders the character of His followers. Theirs is a propaganda tending to social division—separation of children from parents and teachers—and worse still, making an appeal to the ignorant, vulgar and degraded multitude! Here Celsus is a thoroughgoing Pharisee, who would keep the morally abandoned at a distance. He disbelieves in conversion and accuses the Christian teachers of suffering from ophthalmia (iii. 77). He regards the hope of immortality as a dream and scorns the conception of a God who comes down to men and reveals Himself (see iv. *passim*). He ridicules Jews and Christians alike, comparing them to 'frogs holding council in a marsh or to worms crawling together in the corner of a dunghill' (iv. 23)—worms that assert there is a God and that they—the said worms—are like unto Him! Jews and Christians alike are grovellers in ignorance (*ib.* 36). Celsus also perpetrates the familiar jests against the book of Genesis, the story of the fall, the deluge, Abraham and Sarah, etc., sparing us, however, the riddle of Cain's wife. He places the origin of evil in matter (*ib.* 66) and has a nebulous view of the nature of evil (*ib.* 70): he has no use for 'Providence,' revealing his Epicurean leanings (*ib.* 75) and his affinity with Lucretius, and believes that the piety of ants and bees—irrational animals as they are—is of a higher order than man's.

Celsus descends occasionally to sheer recklessness in his desire to score over the low intelligence of Christians. He accuses the Christians, *e.g.*, of being unpatriotic in not observing their country's customs—a fault which they share with the exclusive Jews.

**His elaborate pedantry.**

In his sixth book Origen deals with the objections of Celsus to 'the simplicity of the language of Scripture' as contrasted with the splendour of Plato's polished discourse. Celsus makes a great parade of his recondite learning, introducing the Mithraic mysteries (22-24) as a parallel to point his accusations against Christians and Jews, and, further, a mysterious 'diagram' peculiar to the sect called Ophites, some features of which Origen mentions by way of protest against its connexion with Christianity. Origen has a poor opinion of this elaborate pedantry, and protests against the farrago of foolish fables upon which Celsus bases the taunt, 'what old woman would not be ashamed to utter such things in a whisper, even when making stories to lull an infant to sleep?' (vi. 34). Celsus makes great play with the phrase 'the tree of life,' applied by Christians to the Cross, because forsooth 'Jesus is reported to have been a carpenter!' (*ib.* 37). 'If He had happened to be cast down a precipice, or shoved into a pit, or suffocated by hanging, there would have been invented a precipice of life far beyond the heavens, or a pit of resurrection, or a cord of immortality!' Celsus, in fact, often reminds us of Lucian, *e.g.* 'If God, like Jupiter in the comedy, should on awaking from a lengthened slumber, desire to rescue the human race from evil, why did He send this Spirit of which you speak into one corner (of the earth)?' And again

'It is easy to convict them of worshipping not a god, not even demons, but a dead person' (vii. 68).

**His cheap rationalism.**

It will be gathered from this survey that Celsus was a very able opponent, not less able because unscrupulous, of the religion of the Christians. He shows a remarkable knowledge of its scriptures and doctrine: nothing escapes him—the Incarnation, the doctrine of the Trinity (viii. 13-15), the baldness and secrecy of a cult which has no altars, statues and temples (*ib.* 17), the rejection of sacrifices and the belief in demons (*ib.* 24-36), the inhumanity of God in sending His Son to death (*ib.* 41), the idea of the sanctity of the body and its resurrection (*ib.* 50). It is indeed rather surprising that so able a writer should find so little that is admirable in Christianity. His peculiar bitterness of tone can hardly be explained by mere prejudice: but what its real source was is beyond our conjecture. His object was to discredit the faith with the thinking pagan world rather than to convince Christians of their folly. He failed through lack of spiritual sensitiveness. He has no adequate conception of the life and personality of Jesus, still less of what Matthew Arnold calls His 'secret'—the death unto life—which is of the essence of its appeal to the heart and conscience of mankind. His arguments reappear age after age on the lips of the rationalist critic of Christianity. His cheap and rather coarse jests about the miraculous details of the gospel and the Resurrection story (first testified, as he remarks, by Mary Magdalene, 'a fanatical woman'), his vulgar derision of the numerous sects of Christians and their disparagement of learning and culture have been echoed over and over again. Hardly anything

new can be said against the Christian religion to-day. Like Lucian, Celsus adopts the standpoint of critical and lofty commonsense. But he proves at every turn that he knows nothing of Christianity from within, and he can never face the unanswerable argument of spiritual transformation—the mighty change wrought by the faith of Jesus on all sorts and conditions of souls. Celsus may have had some weight with second-century minds, but as a paper-controversy with the Christians the *True Word* had little permanent influence. Its immediate refutation, even more convincing than the able and fine-spirited reply of Origen, lay in the Christian character, which, if it failed fully to represent the Christian ideal, nevertheless was a serious obstacle to the argumentative triumph of the critical outsider.

# THE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY ON ITS ENVIRONMENT

The Gospel was—in a way in which no religion, nothing which spoke of the unseen and the eternal, ever had been or could be—a religion of the affections, a religion of sympathy. By what it said, by the way in which it said it, Christianity opened absolutely a new sphere, new possibilities, a new world, to human affections. . . . And in the daily and yearly progress of the struggling Church, these affections were fed and moulded, and deeply sunk into character. The Latin races learned this secret, in the community of conviction and hope, in the community of suffering between the highborn and the slave—they learned it when they met together at the place of execution, in the bloodstained amphitheatre, in the crowded prison-house . . . in the catacombs, at the graves of the martyrs, in the Eucharistic feast, in the sign of the Redeemer's cross, in the kiss of peace. . . . They learnt it in that new social interest, that reverence and compassion and care for the poor which . . . had become, since the Sermon on the Mount, the characteristic of Christ's religion. They learnt it in that new commandment of the Divine Founder of the Church, the great all-embracing Christian word, charity.

R. W. Church.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY ON ITS ENVIRONMENT

In the previous chapters we have gathered some conception of the features of the Graeco-Roman environment which affected Christianity. By the close of the second century its organisation and social status had become facts that could not be ignored either by imperial officials or society in general: and the converse enquiry has to be considered. What was the influence of the new religion on its surroundings? At what points did it touch and change the life of the world in which it had established itself?

**Christianity not revolutionary in method.**

The Christian society had accepted the imperial régime, its government, its army, its judicial procedure and its social institutions. Where it resisted edicts, rites and customs that were opposed to the spirit and teaching of Jesus, the resistance was not active, but passive. Its methods were not revolutionary. No charge of *laesa maiestas* against the Christians had the slightest foundation. Christianity accomplished its reforms bloodlessly by the sheer influence of the Christian ideal and the Christian temper. Its essential dogmas of the equality of man and the eternal value of the soul were clearly destined when rooted in the public conscience to develop

a new humanitarianism in the valuation of human life and to undermine the class distinctions of the empire.

**Slavery.**

Take the case of slavery. We have already noted that Christianity in dealing with slavery supported no general measure of manumission. Even St. Paul does not plead with Philemon, the master of the runaway Onesimus, for the freedom of the offender, though it is natural to assume that he hoped for this result of his tactfully phrased and moving appeal. What Christianity aimed at was the moral and spiritual elevation of both masters and slaves. We find slaves in Christian households : [1] they remained slaves while lifted to the spiritual status of brothers : it could not be otherwise when they shared the sacred elements of the Eucharist with their employers. Slaves of both sexes are among the most honoured of the martyrs, *e.g.* Blandina, most heroic and gentle victim of an inhuman persecution. Two Roman bishops of the second century, Pius and Callistus, sprang from the ranks of slavery. It is not without significance that the nomenclature of slavery was glorified by the ethics of the gospel and the apostles who did not hesitate to call themselves slaves of Christ ; while at the same time Christian morality hallowed the servile virtues of obedience, gentleness, patience and contentment.[2] In other words, Christianity at once accepted slavery and prepared the way for its abolition. The question of enfranchisement, which became under Constantine a question of practical politics, would never have been raised but for the religion of Jesus, and even Gibbon admits that it was owing to the

[1] See Justin, *Apol.* ii. 2, and Athenagoras, *Supplic.* xxxv.

[2] See art. 'Contentment' in *ERE*.

influence of Christianity that the enslavement of captives and prisoners of war was finally abolished.

**The elevation of womanhood.**

An even more remarkable sign of Christian influence was the development of the status of womanhood. In all ages of Christianity women have been among the noblest saints, workers and mystics of the Church. There was no place for women in Mithraism, which was a man's religion—one of the defects which sealed its doom. The Christian dogma of the equality of the sexes in Christ carried with it the principle of a mighty social revolution. St. Paul,[1] who proclaimed the subjection of women on grounds of Christian expediency, and in the particular case of the Corinthian Church forbade on grounds of propriety the appearance of women unveiled and their speaking in the churches, nevertheless reckoned Priscilla of Ephesus and Phoebe of Cenchreae—probably both ladies of influence and wealth—as his fellow labourers and ministers to the flock: and these were by no means exceptions. Take the women of Rom. xvi., Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, the mother of Rufus, Julias and the sister of Nereus, and also the 'widows' of the Pastoral Epistles. Pliny, in the letter to Trajan, refers to the work of Christian women as deaconesses (*ministrae*). In that early Christian romance—the *Acta Pauli*—while we may allow for the imaginative element, the figure of Thekla—a lady missionary and revivalist—is very prominent and can hardly be fictitious; while the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles are full of the names of Christian women. In the Montanist movement women prophetesses

[1] See Garvie, *Studies of Paul and Gospel*, for a careful resumé of St. Paul's views on this subject, p. 294 f.

and preachers were numerous. No difference of sex was recognised in the pre-Decian and subsequent persecutions. In the last persecution under Licinius an edict forbidding women to worship with man, to enter places of worship and to be taught by any but their own sex, was issued, not out of concern for morality, but as a measure intended to repress the influence of women in the Christian movement. The prejudice of the early Church against mixed marriages gradually gave way. There had been, of course, no penalty attached to such marriages: and towards the close of the second century, owing to the fact that Christian girls outnumbered Christian youths, Tertullian did not hesitate to approve of the union between those whose social position was unequal. Marriages with freedmen and slaves were permitted and sanctioned by Callistus, bishop of Rome, on ecclesiastical grounds, and exemption was granted by him from civil sanction and legal ratification. In a word, the Christian emphasis on the sanctity of marriage and the purity of family life, combined with the insistence on personal chastity in an age of lax morality and easy divorce, from the first days of the Christian movement gave to womanhood a sacred value and to the individual woman certain rights the significance of which has not even now been exhausted.

**Child-life.**

The social ethics of paganism did not prohibit the exposure and desertion of infants. The Christian Fathers and Apologists [1] framed an indignant protest against these horrible practices, and clearly showed that in the Christian

[1] See *e.g.* Justin Martyr, *Apol.* 1, and cf. *Oxyr. Pap.* 744, a letter from a husband in Alexandria to his wife and sisters at home, wherein he says of an expected infant, 'If it is a boy, let it be: if it is a girl, throw it out.'

judgment a child had rights which it was a sin against God and humanity to ignore. Incidentally, the Christian baptism of infants as a sign of incorporation within the household of God involved a conception of childhood which touched the conscience of the Roman world. It is to the credit of the Stoic philosophers that they uttered their protest against the destruction of life in the womb and exposure of infants in public places as sheer murder: but Christianity brought a divine sanction to bear on a problem which, owing to the pauperism of the empire, emperor and reformer found difficult to solve. The hospitals, which the Council of Nicaea ordered to be built in the principal towns, were doubtless intended to be shelters for foundlings, that is, children's homes and orphanages as well as institutions for alleviating physical suffering and healing disease. Here we have a distinct proof of the new value of human life introduced by Christianity. It was not till 374 that Valentinian made infanticide a criminal offence by a law which attached the penalty of murder to it.

**Charity.**

In the early church at Jerusalem we witness an attempt to organise charity on a human basis. It was not in reality the establishment of a commune, but rather the creation of a social bond between rich and poor. There was no compulsory levy. The wealthy gave voluntarily of their abundance to their poorer brethren and sisters. How long this lasted we cannot say: but the Epistle of St. James appears to depict a failure of the spirit of charity, and denounces the oppression of the poor by the thoughtless rich. Covetousness is frequently condemned by St. Paul and St. James and the duty of almsgiving

inculcated. They are followed by early writers like the Shepherd of Hermas, Justin, Aristides and Tertullian. On the whole, the Christian community from the first was generous to its poor. The peril of elevating almsgiving to the level of a sacrament which secured merit and moral expiation was not absent: but the beneficence of the Christian community was disinterested at heart, and stands opposed to the system of doles and amusement with which the public officials from the emperor downward sought to conciliate a needy proletariat with its perpetual demand for 'Bread and the circus games.' Christian charity [1] was carefully organised and judiciously administered, even if its dangers were not always realised: yet, if occasionally more harm than good was done, the Church started a tradition of caring for the poor which to this day is a marked feature of Roman Catholicism and, if not so systematically, is practised by all other Christian communities.

**Influence of Christianity on the institutions of the empire.**

**(a) Social customs and strata.**

It is difficult from the scanty evidence available to estimate the influence of the social morality of the Christian society. That conscience had been awakened by the practice of infanticide as early as Nerva is proved by the attempt to provide 'alimentary institutions' for the purpose of maintaining poor boys or girls. Some of the emperors were interested in this experiment, which, however, accomplished little: the evil was not really remedied until the law of Valentinian was passed: and

[1] See especially Euseb., *H.E.* iv. 23, for a letter to Soter, Bishop of Rome, in which the practice of sending help to the needy, and 'to the brethren condemned to the mines,' is commended as a happy tradition of the church of Rome.

it is more likely that the idea of counteracting the evil by charity arose from the decline of the population than from regard to the principles of a persecuted and hated sect like the Christians. But the condemnation of child-murder uttered by the Christians told in the long run. Christianity uttered a death sentence on all the forms of cruelty—gladiatorial fights and debasing shows of the arena, where human blood was poured out like water, and it shows itself from the first utterly hostile to certain features of the pagan life—immorality, drunkenness, gluttony, which St. Paul has specified in the first chapter of his Epistle to the Romans. In fact, the individual was called to suffer a daily martyrdom from his friction with the spirit and practices of the world—more constant, if less tragic, than the friction with the imperial authorities, which so often meant death. No doubt the majority of the Christians belonged to the lower strata of society—slaves, artisans and freedmen. But there were followers of Christ among the cultured and official classes. Outside the New Testament we find in the pages of Tacitus the names of Pomponia Graecina, the consul Titus, Flavius Clemens and his wife—all converts to Christ. There were men of position, wealth and education in the ranks of the Church. Even making allowances for the rhetoric of Tertullian, we accept his statement that Christians were to be found on town-councils, in business, in the army, in the senate and the palace. Christians held positions in the government service, and perhaps [1] were actually governors of provinces, and as such exempt from the duty of offering sacrifice. In great cities like Alexandria and Caesarea orators and professors were won to Christ.

[1] See Euseb. *H.E.* viii. 1.

**(b) The army.**

If in the court and in the government services, so also in the army Christians were to be found, and amid its special temptations then as now fought the good fight of their faith. There the military oath, the worship of the emperors, the military distinctions, the pagan festivals and other elements of army life conflicted with the Christian conscience. In the early days of Christianity these were in themselves a formidable barrier to the Christian profession on the part of the legionaries. About the middle of the second century the numbers of Christian soldiers began to increase. There were no doubt conscientious objectors to certain rules of military discipline, and these suffered for conscience' sake. But the majority were guided by the rule of common sense, and observed obedience to the army regulations in the interests of their comrades. The incident of the "Thundering" legion recorded by Eusebius[1] is significant of the respect which the Christians evoked. The story ran that in the battle with the Germans and Sarmatians the army of Marcus Aurelius suffered from thirst. The Melitene legion, which before entering battle invariably bent its knees in prayer, followed the custom on this occasion, with the result that lightning drove the enemy to flight and refreshing showers alleviated the thirst of the victorious army. Generally speaking, the army officers were tolerant of individual religious opinions and customs, such as making the sign of the cross at the sacrifices, and accepted without repressive measures the growing numbers of the Christians. In the persecutions of Diocletian the Christian soldiers suffered severely until the reaction under Constantine, who allowed the cross

[1] Euseb. *H.E.* v. 5, and cf. Workman, *PEC*, p. 186.

to be affixed to the colours of the regiments during his expedition against Maxentius.

**Slow progress for two and a half centuries succeeded by swift expansion.**

Now, the evidence of the influence of the new religion during the first two and a half centuries of its progress is to be found chiefly, as we have seen, in the literature of the Church itself. 'Down to the close of the second century,' says Harnack[1] 'the Church was too small numerically to exert any influence worth mentioning upon the main currents of life, while the task of adjusting itself to the world claimed all its energy during the third century.' All the available data go to prove the general correctness of this opinion. The study of the Apologists shows Christianity in a defensive position rather than in aggressive activity. Moreover, the growth of an ethical ideal is slow: it may be reduced to practice in the lives of heroic individuals, notable and anonymous: but no examples, however distinguished, can destroy in a day an old order of belief and conduct. The leaven of the new life had only just begun to work in the society of the empire during its first 150 years: after that, the manifestations of its re-vitalising energy became more obvious, and in the eighty years preceding the Council of Nicaea, 325, the expansion of the Christian community proceeded apace. The persecutions of Decius and Diocletian eloquently testify to its growing influence. It had, in fact, become a mighty factor in the empire.

**Details of expansion.**

Harnack, in his invaluable researches, has collected all the accessible evidence of this progress. He calculates

[1] *MEC*, ii. p. 337.

that in the last half century before the accession of Constantine Christianity included more than half the population in the provinces which then constituted our modern Asia Minor. This was probably the case with the region of Thrace opposite Bithynia, Armenia and the island of Cyprus. One city—Edessa—the capital of Osrhoene, a small state between the Euphrates and Tigris, was almost wholly Christian. In other parts of the empire—Syria and Egypt—the proportion was considerable. In Rome, Lower Italy and Middle Italy this was also the case: in Rome at the time of Constantine's accession the number may have been nearly 100,000, representative of all classes, the upper and influential strata included. The provinces of Africa, Spain, Achaia, Thessaly and Macedonia, the southern parts of Gaul—all the Mediterranean lands, in fact—contained a large Christian population. In the northern parts of Europe—Upper Italy and North Gaul, Belgica, Rhoetia and Germany—the Christian representation was sparse, but larger in Palestine, Phoenicia, Arabia and Mesopotamia. Christianity was Hellenistic from the first, and its progress in Greek-speaking countries relatively swifter than elsewhere. In Greek-speaking Asia Minor it was predominant. Latin Christianity began to develop in the age of Marcus Aurelius, but it derived its strength from Hellenism, as we may gather from the works of the Fathers, who wrote in Latin—Hilary, Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine. It created a distinctive phase of theological and ecclesiastical thought: but it owed its creative inspiration to Greek sources, and can never really be detached as an absolutely new system from the older Greek tradition.

# THE TRIUMPH AND ITS CAUSES

The triumph of the Christian Church is that it is *there*—that the most daring of all speculative dreams, instead of being found impracticable, has been carried into effect, and when carried into effect, instead of being confined to a few select spirits, has spread itself over a vast space of the earth's surface, and when thus diffused, instead of giving place after an age or two to something more adapted to a later time, has endured for two thousand years, and at the end of two thousand years, instead of lingering as a mere wreck spared by the tolerance of the lovers of the past, still displays vigour and a capacity of adjusting itself to new conditions, and lastly, in all transformations it undergoes, remains visibly the same thing and inspired by the Founder's universal and unquenchable spirit.

SEELEY.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE TRIUMPH AND ITS CAUSES

**The persecution under Diocletian.**

THE latter half of the third century consisted of a long peace between two fierce persecutions. The first, under Decius in 249, continued under the two succeeding emperors —Gallus and Valerian: it was a time of awful strain for the Christians, and apostasy took place on a large scale. With the reign of Gallienus [1] the period of peace began and lasted from 260 till about 300, when Diocletian commenced the fatal policy of repression (induced thereto by the influence of his partner Galerius), which has for ever stained his name. Eusebius records in his eighth book the terrible story of destruction—destruction of churches and books; imprisonments of clergy and massacres of men and women—in Nicomedia and other churches of Asia Minor, in Syria, Egypt and Mesopotamia. After two years of this persecution, in which the Church suffered the horrors of hell, Diocletian abdicated in favour of the Augusti, Constantius and Galerius. The persecution which had raged in the far West, Gaul and Britain died down, but continued in Italy till the revolt of Maxentius. It smouldered on in the East, and there were fierce confla-

[1] Cf. Euseb., *H.E.* vii. 13, for a rescript addressed to Bishop Dionysius of Alexandria and other bishops, giving them permission to return to their sees.

grations in Egypt and Syria under Maximin Daza. The year 311 saw the last of the persecution in Asia Minor, while in 313 the end came in Syria and Egypt.

**Vogue of Mithraism.**

Persecution was not the only foe of the sorely suffering Church. While the old cults of paganism steadily decayed, the newer gods of the East died hard. Most notable was the reaction in favour of the Sun-god, Mithra. There were strong resemblances between Christianity and Mithraism. The cult of Mithra had a mediator and a redeemer, proclaimed a doctrine of immortality, used rites analogous to baptism and communion, practised asceticism, worshipped on Sunday and observed Christmas day, Dec. 25, as 'the birthday of the Sun invincible.' About the year 304 Mithra was proclaimed the Protector of the Roman Empire at Carnuntum, in Pannonia, and as late as 390 'the sacrifice of the Taurobolium was celebrated close to the Vatican, at the very doors of the basilica of St. Peter.'[1] In a word, Mithraism was the longest-lived rival of Christianity: but it succumbed at length to the missionary zeal of the Church, which proclaimed not a mythical Hero, but a historical Saviour of humanity.

**Rise of Neoplatonism and Manichaeism.**

It is also important that the student, in view of the revival of paganism afterwards to be initiated by Julian, should realise the influence of Ammonius Saccas, Plotinus and Porphyry, the great Neoplatonist teachers of the third century. This phase of thought was the expiring attempt of Hellenism to formulate a mystic philosophy which

[1] Cf. Duchesne, *EHC*, i. c. 27.

would satisfy both the intellect and the soul of man. It had features of attractiveness and even nobility, but was too much compact of metaphysical ideas to appeal to any but the thoughtful. God as the Absolute became an abstraction remote from the actual life of man and inaccessible except to ecstasy, so that He could never be the God of the many, only the God of an intellectual coterie. Side by side with Neoplatonism, the movement of Mâni, a mystic of Mesopotamia, born near Ctesiphon in 215, spread with amazing rapidity to the West. Manichaeism was a new factor destined to affect the intellectual and religious life of Christianity. Augustine, as readers of the *Confessions* know, was for some time in his career powerfully influenced by it. Its doctrine of dualism—the everlasting conflict between Light and Darkness—is Persian in character, but it was linked in Mâni's setting with the Old Testament cosmogony. While it regarded the Old Testament prophets, beginning with Moses, as emissaries of darkness and a false faith, it set forth Noah, Abraham, Zoroaster, Buddha and Jesus as messengers of light. Jesus, however, is not the historical person of that name, seeing that he was inspired by the devil, but a creature of the imagination, an aeon and a being incapable of suffering. The worship was simple, the disciples were vegetarians and ascetics, and their chief aim was to destroy the sensual aspects of life and to attain to complete victory of the element of light within the soul.[1] Undoubtedly Mâni was a thinker of remarkable boldness, and modern opinion tends to regard his system not as 'a mere patchwork of older beliefs,' but as a genuine attempt to relieve some of the difficulties of

[1] Cf. *ERE* art. 'Manichaeism,' by A. A. Bevan, from whom the succeeding opinions are quoted.

the Christian view of human nature as at once the creation of God and the seat of feelings and appetites which are corrupt. 'The Manichaean dogma that humanity is of Satanic origin, however shocking it may be to modern sentiment, greatly simplified the problem.' About the beginning of the fourth century the new religion had rooted itself in the West, and Eusebius is evidently startled by its prevalence.[1] He dates its first appearance in the empire from the reign of Probus (279-80) about three years after Mâni had been put to death by crucifixion near Susa.

**Causes of the victory of Christianity : the importance of standpoint.**

Yet, in spite of persecution and of the rivalry of contending forms of faith and thought, Christianity triumphed : and it is essential to form a clear idea of the main factors which contributed to a victory which has changed all life. If we turn to the famous fifteenth chapter of the *Decline and Fall*, in which Gibbon sets forth the five causes—zeal of the Jews, the doctrine of immortality, the miraculous power of the Church, its pure morality and the strength of its organisation—it may be difficult for the modern mind to understand the horror which it provoked in the minds of devout Christians when it first appeared. For Gibbon frankly at the outset disclaims the intention of dealing with any but 'secondary causes'; that is to say, he intends to ignore the argument drawn from its divine origin and the convincing evidence of its doctrine. The reader is thus prepared for the naturalistic standpoint of the historian, if not for the sneers

[1] Cf. Euseb. *H.E.* vii. 31.

and sarcasms with which he decorates his account of Christianity. These, however, have little weight to-day compared with the curious impression of obsoleteness which his method leaves on the mind. For this, of course, Gibbon is not to blame, but his argument illustrates the immense difference which the doctrine of evolution and the science of comparative religion have made to our thinking. We no longer go to work on the assumption that Christianity is an isolated phenomenon of supernatural origin, and therefore an entirely new religion incapable of being compared and coordinated with its predecessors and contemporaries in the realm of the spirit. Its uniqueness is not due to a divine origin which cannot be attributed to other forms of faith, but rather to the fact that it takes its place in a progressive unfolding of the Divine mind as a religion which perfects and fulfils its forerunners, while setting in motion forces and energies calculated to hasten the supremacy of the will of God in human life. We study it no longer from the standpoint of *a priori* ideas of God's operations—ideas of what are inherently fitting and probable in His self-revelation to man: but rather find in its actual impact on history and its effect on experience the justification of its claim to be God's supreme answer to human need. Christianity, as we have seen, absorbed much of the thought of its environment—Jewish, Hellenic, Oriental—in its appeal to the world: it based the forms of its organisation on the model of imperial administration and government: its external rites and observances had their analogues in other faiths of the empire: it revealed points of contact with the noblest ethical ideals and system of the ancient world. Yet all these correspondences with and obligations to its historical environment,

past and present, only serve to accentuate the uniqueness of its power to satisfy the needs of the soul, which yearns for God, reconciliation and inner peace. Can we explain the secret of its supremacy? Once more, let us attempt to answer a question which has often engaged and will for ever engage the interest of mankind.

**1. A new view of God.**

First of all, Christianity is the presentation of religion under an entirely new aspect. The Jewish scriptures prepared the way for a culminating manifestation of the Divine nature and purpose, while the lofty and noble monotheism, which set apart Israel from all surrounding nations and tribes, was to be the primary and unchanging feature of all future thought regarding the Deity. Nevertheless, the Hebrew God was a being remote, austerely holy in character, national rather than universal, who had to be propitiated by sacrifice. Christianity, retaining the Jewish conception of God's unity, added to it the appealing idea that God, as Father of the race, was actually seeking man, yearning to be found of man and was not remote from man, but in the very centre of human life, sharing from all eternity the struggles, the sorrow and burden of His creatures and suffering on account of their transgression. To the conception of His Righteousness was attached the fact of His Love. This is essentially the argument of the noble unknown writer of the Epistle to Hebrews, the first words of whose eloquent statement enshrine in one sentence and sum up as well as a single condensed utterance can, the secret of Christianity's victory over paganism and Judaism. God has been speaking in history, and His latest word is—Love, incarnate in His crucified Son.

**2. The person of Christ.**

The 'new covenant' was a 'better' one, in that it incarnated God in humanity. The love of a seeking God was an idea to which Jewish thought was always approximating, but it could never have laid hold of the soul, if it had not been embodied in a historical redeemer who had lived among men, the 'Logos of Life' that men could touch and see. The witness of His reality—His real humanness was irrefragable. Contrast this with the mythical figure of the Sun-god, a fiction of imagination: yet he was the most influential of the deities that appealed to Rome. The Christ-redeemer conquered because the story of His life was authentic: it was not a mass of legend: the gospels were not disfigured with the kind of incidents which provoke a Lucian to scorn: there was no myth that could offend the sensitive soul. Moreover, the Greek mind could relate the incarnate Jesus to the Logos or wisdom of the deity without thereby destroying the genuineness of His humanity. He had been present in history all the time, and now He had appeared in the most wonderful form that the world had seen. The conception of the God-man who lived, taught, healed, raised from the dead—who was the friend and saviour of the lost—entranced their imagination and appealed to their heart. The primitive gospel, say the *Ur-Marcus* —with its picture of the human Jesus—as soon as it began to circulate in the Roman world doomed to extinction the Roman idea of a deified emperor.

**3. The loftiness and purity of the new morality.**

The old systems of ethics had in many ways helped to form a high ideal of conduct: but they failed because, while setting forth a theory of good and evil, they were

powerless to produce the capacity to carry it into practice. As against what St. Paul called 'the inability of the law,'[1] Christianity, by touching the heart and moving the conscience, accomplished what reason could not do, and provided an Example and a Life which moved to high issues the simplest and the most learned, the morally weak and the morally strong. It was felt that Jesus not only gave the standard, but also imparted the capacity of right living: not only awakened a sense of failure and sin, but inspired the sinner with a new hope. Humility was added to the list of virtues, inasmuch as only by self-surrender could the soul attain to moral freedom. No doubt the Christian ideal was transcendently lofty: but the faith which worked by love enabled men to dare great things in the struggle 'to be well-pleasing to Christ.' Not only in the personal conflict with evil, but in the facing of the ordinary tests of life—sorrow, change and calamity—the soul was now supplied with an inner strength which the Stoic formula of living 'according to nature' could never give to average humanity, but which a suffering sympathetic Saviour inbreathed.

**4. The doctrine of immortality.**

From the same source came a new view of death and a new assurance of immortality. Immortality was a fairly common idea in the Graeco-Roman world: but the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body, associated as it was with the truth of our Lord's resurrection, laid hold of the popular mind and converted doubt of a future life into certitude. Neither Persia nor Egypt were able to invest their belief in immortality, whether by Mithraism or by the Isis-Serapis cult, with

[1] Ro. $8^3$.

the same convincing sanction as the Christian doctrine of eternal life, based as it was on the fact of the historic resurrection of Jesus. In Himself He was the guarantee of a future life, and had made a disclosure of immortality which fascinated the multitude.

**5. The social and religious organisation of the faith.**

Add to this the emphasis laid on love and the equality of man in the teaching of Jesus. As against the individualism of Stoic ethics, even the individualism which colours the noble precepts of Epictetus, Christianity proclaimed the brotherhood of the race and socialised human life. It did more than proclaim brotherhood: it practised brotherly love and broke down the social exclusiveness of the ancient world. It gathered into a living society all sorts and conditions of men and women, nobles and slaves, high-born and poor, learned and ignorant, and implanted in them the consciousness of a common relationship with each other by virtue of a common union with their Head—the Head of the one body, which is the Church. It was this *universalism* in temper and outlook as well as in the institutions of Church life which brought a new spirit into society. It created a unified and disciplined community with a genius for charity, unselfishness and missionary zeal.

**6. Its power to endure the test of life and experience.**

Finally, the faith when brought to the test of life and experience was able to stand. It is not necessary to idealise the life of the early Christians. No doubt there were lamentable failures, and the growth of the ethical ideal of Christ was slow. The pictures of Christian life extant in the Epistles of St. John and St. Paul are sufficient

to discourage an extravagant view of a swift conquest of the tendencies and standards of paganism. The vices of the old world were not easily destroyed and converts to Christ faced a terrific test. It is no doubt true that Christianity allied itself to Greek philosophy, knowing how to criticise and how to complete it, as Harnack reminds us: but it allowed itself no sort of accommodation with the secular spirit. On its ethical side it was uncompromising in its claims, proclaiming the necessity of forsaking the world in order to save the soul, of dying to sin in order to attain the higher life. The amazing thing is that this condition of self-surrender, on the face of it an ideal impracticable for the common clay, the heroic 'for earth too hard,' met with so wonderful a response. The Apologists are able in the second century to base a defence of Christianity on the superior morality of the Christians: 'by their fruits' they were already to be known.

**The vision of the Shining Cross.**

For seven years after Diocletian's abdication we have a dreary period of internecine strife between the Augusti and the Caesars—a kind of quadrangular duel, from which Constantine, by a combination of ability and good fortune, emerged as victor. His defeat of Maxentius at the Mulvian Bridge in 312, when his Gaulish cavalry broke up the Praetorian Guards, was followed by the revolt, defeat and death of his colleague Licinius in 323. He was now sole emperor. Just before the battle of the Mulvian Bridge, as Eusebius records, Constantine [1] saw the vision of the Shining Cross in the sky with the words

[1] Cf. *Vita Const.* i. 28, 29. But see art. 'Constantine,' by Workman, in *ERE* for a criticism of the story.

*Hoc vince*—Conquer by this—and in a dream that night he was bidden to take it for his standard. In the following year, 313, the famous Edict of Milan [1] was issued by Constantine and Licinius, restoring to the Christians full liberty of worship and all their property. All the historians note the universal gladness evoked by this act of grace. Eusebius tells how after the battle of the Mulvian Bridge, when Constantine had entered the city in triumph, he commanded a trophy of the Saviour's passion to be placed in the hand of his own statue. Holding the sign of the Cross in his hand, he ordered the following words to be inscribed : ' By this salutary sign, the true ornament of bravery, I have saved your city. . . .' The Cross had displaced the Roman eagles, and was henceforth to be the symbol of the imperial greatness. It was veritably the birth of a new world—not in the sense that Caesarism was dead, but in the sense that Christianity had inaugurated a new ideal of life, wherein Caesarism had no place.

**Our hope of to-day.**

Nevertheless, as Gwatkin says, if Christ had conquered, the natural man still remained. The natural man still remains, and the task of Christianity, after sixteen centuries, is as urgent as it ever was. Once more the world is facing a new order. Even in the present cataclysm of a world-war, which to many is the indication that the Church has failed, Christianity remains our one hope of the future. It has never been superseded. It reasserts its ancient and eternal law of a death unto life—both for the nation and the individual. The Cross still shines in a dark sky : and the religion of the Cross is still the promise of a kingdom that cannot be removed. The

[1] See Euseb. x. 5, and Lactantius, *De Mor. Persecutorum*, 48.

Master of Life still cries 'Lift up your heads: your redemption draweth nigh.' Who can doubt that if the new democratic spirit means a real brotherhood of the nations, international concord and social peace, then the dawn of the kingdom is at hand? By a process that to human vision covers many generations, but which to God is as one day, the course of human affairs moves steadily on to a divine event: and, to-day, as in the ages past, 'the creation is waiting with eager longing for the sons of God to be revealed,' and the will of God to be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

# APPENDICES

# APPENDIX I

## CONSPECTUS OF AUTHORITIES

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# APPENDIX II

## TABLE OF DATES

THE date of the *accession* of each emperor from Augustus to *Constantine* is given, with selection of events bearing on the history of Christianity within each reign. (The chronology followed is mainly that of Bury's Gibbon.)

B.C. 30. AUGUSTUS (formerly Octavian).

B.C. 20. Herod rebuilds Temple of Jerusalem.

B.C. 4. BIRTH OF JESUS.
Death of Herod. Revolt of Jews suppressed by Varus.

A.D. 6. Archelaus banished. Judaea becomes a Roman province.

A.D. 14. TIBERIUS.

19. Expulsion of Jews from Rome. Tiberius destroys Temple of Isis and throws statues into the Tiber.

20. Pontius Pilate procurator of Judaea.

29. CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS.

35. Conversion of St. Paul.

37. CALIGULA.

41. CLAUDIUS.

*c.* 50. Clement of Rome born ; died *c.* 95 A.D.

52. Felix procurator of Judaea.
Jews banished from Rome.

54. NERO.

55. Nero legalises worship of Isis.

60. Festus succeeds Felix as procurator of Judaea.

A.D. 62. Persecution of Christians by Ananias the High Priest, and martyrdom of James the Just.
Albinus succeeds Felix as procurator of Judaea.
64. Gessius Florus succeeds Albinus as procurator of Judaea.
Neronian Persecution and burning of Rome.
(?) 67. Martyrdom of St. Peter and St. Paul.

A.D. 68. GALBA.
69. OTHO.
69. VITELLIUS.
70. VESPASIAN.
Siege and sack of Jerusalem by Titus.
Birth of Ignatius.
79. TITUS.
81. DOMITIAN.
95. Persecution of Christians.
96. St. John probably alive.
96. NERVA.
98. TRAJAN.
*c.* 100. Birth of Marcion.
116. Revolt of Jews throughout East suppressed by Lucius Quintus.
117. HADRIAN.
121. Birth of Justin Martyr (*d.* 151).
130. Hadrian rebuilds Jerusalem and calls it Aelia Capitolina.
132. Revolt of Jews under Bar-Cochba.
138. ANTONINUS PIUS.
140. Birth of Irenaeus (*d.* 202).
*c.* 150. Birth of Clement of Alex.
Shepherd of Hermas appears.
155. Martyrdom of Polycarp.
*c.* 160. Birth of Tertullian.
161. MARCUS AURELIUS ANTONINUS.
177-8. Great persecution at Lyons.
180. COMMODUS.
180. The martyrs of Scili.
*c.* 185. Birth of Origen (*d. c.* 253).

A.D. 193. PERTINAX.
211. CARACALLA AND GETA.
217. MACRINUS.
219. HELIOGABALUS.
222. ALEXANDER SEVERUS.
235. MAXIMIN.
Persecution of Christians.
238. GORDIAN I. and GORDIAN II.
Maximus and Balbinus proclaimed emperors (with Gordian III.), but murdered by the Praetorians.
GORDIAN III.
244. PHILIP.
249. DECIUS.
Persecution of Christians.
251. GALLUS.
253. VALERIAN.
Gallienus proclaimed Augustus jointly with his father Valerian.
260. GALLIENUS.
Rights of Church to hold property recognised.
268. CLAUDIUS.
270. AURELIAN.
St. Antony introduces Monachism.
Aurelian affirms primacy of Roman Church.
275. TACITUS.
276. PROBUS.
282. CARUS.
283. Carinus proclaimed Augustus jointly with his father Carus.
284. On death of Carus, Carinus and his brother Numerian join Augusti.
284. DIOCLETIAN.
286. Maximian proclaimed Augustus with Diocletian.
303. Persecution of Christians.
*c.* 304. Mithra declared at Carnuntum Protector of Roman Empire.

A.D. 305. Abdication of Diocletian and Maximian followed by a period of civil wars.
Constantius and Galerius proclaimed Augusti.
Maximin and Severus proclaimed Caesars.
306. Death of Constantius. Constantine proclaimed Augustus by the army, but allowed only the title of Caesar by Galerius.
Severus proclaimed Augustus in place of Constantius.
Rebellion of Maximian and Maxentius his son.
307. Severus surrenders to Maximian.
Maximian marries his daughter Fausta to Constantine, and proclaims him Augustus jointly with himself.
War of the Augusti (Maxentius, Maximian and Constantine) against Galerius, Licinius and Maximin (rival Augusti).
308. Death of Maximian.
311. Death of Galerius; division of Eastern Empire between Licinius and Maximin.
312. War between Constantine and Maxentius, who is defeated at Turin, Verona and Saxa Rubra.
A.D. 313. PEACE OF THE CHURCH. Edict of toleration by Constantine and Licinius. Licinius defeats Maximin.
314. Constantine defeats Licinius; mutual peace proclaimed.
323. War between Constantine and Licinius, who is defeated and put to death.
323. CONSTANTINE sole emperor.
325. Council of Nicaea.

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